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AUTHOR Quint, Janet C.; Miller, Cynthia; Pastor, Jennifer J.; Cytron, Rachel E.

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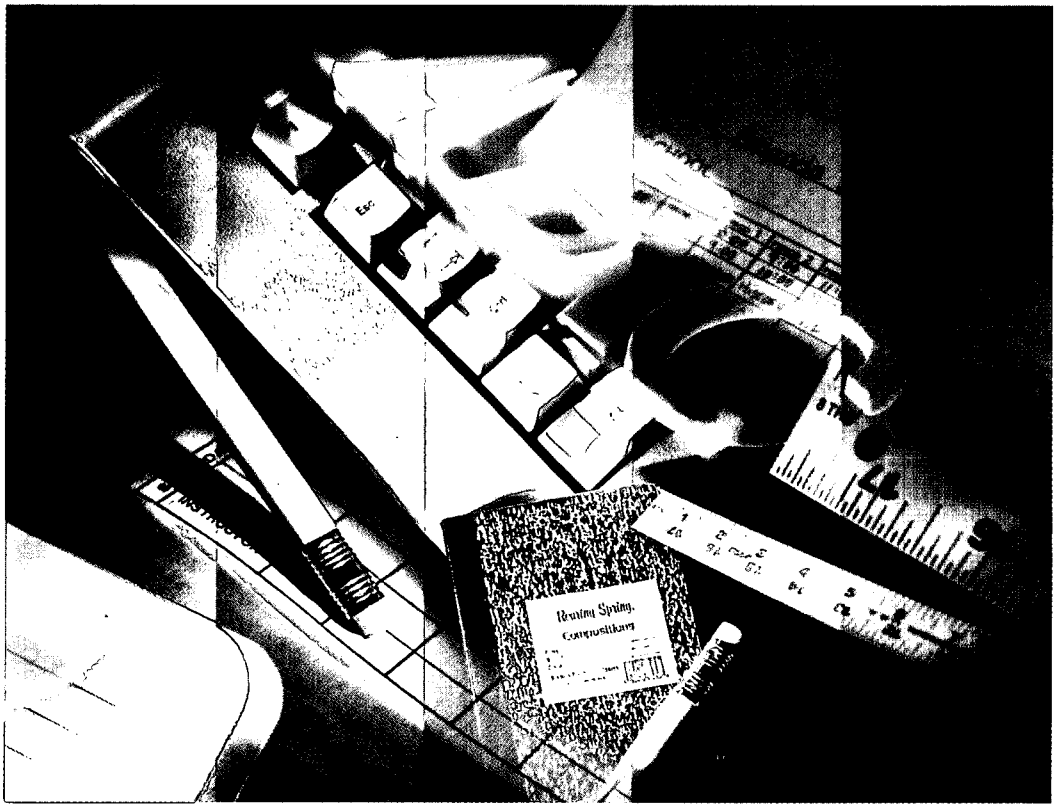
ABSTRACT

This report presents findings on the implementation and impacts of Project Transition, a research and demonstration program implemented at Pulaski High School in Milwaukee (Wisconsin) during the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years, and in Schlagle High School in Kansas City (Kansas) during the 1996-97 school year. The program was deigned to test the effectiveness of a set of reforms intended to improve students' attendance and performance in the first year of high school. Project Transition implemented three primary strategies: (1) student-teacher teams of 4 teachers and approximately 120 students who share many core classes; (2) daily teacher team meetings; and (3) a coach position and other supports for teachers. The program created a more supportive environment at both schools, but it achieved positive effects on student academic achievement only at Schlagle, where it was more fully implemented. This study provides evidence of what such a program can achieve in a short period of time, and it also shows the limits of the strategy. The study shows that although a rather inexpensive but well-run intervention can improve important aspects of school performance, the effects are not dramatic. Well-implemented transition programs are just one element of a broader K-12 strategy. Four appendixes present a survey analysis, the response analysis for the student survey, a discussion of unadjusted impacts, and the regression-adjustment model. (Contains 28 tables, 8 figures, and 53 references.) (SLD)

PROJECT TRANSITION:

Testing an Intervention to Help High School Freshmen Succeed



Janet C. Quint
Cynthia Miller
Jennifer J. Pastor
Rachel E. Cytron

April 1999

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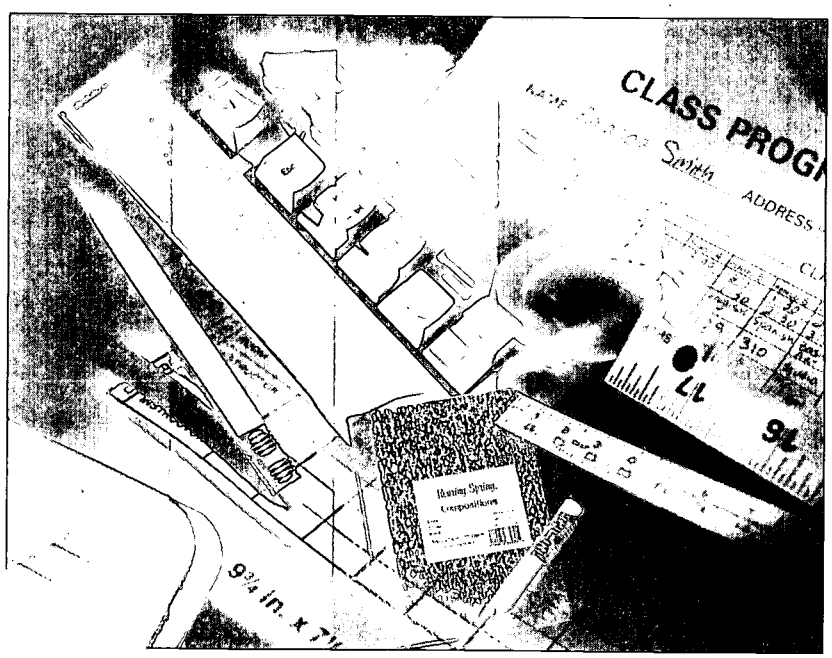

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The Project Transition demonstration was supported by five funders — the Ford Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Helen Bader Foundation, Inc., The Joyce Foundation, and the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR), supported by the U.S. Department of Education — and the two participating school districts, the Kansas City, Kansas, Public Schools and the Milwaukee Public Schools.

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The findings and conclusions presented in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

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Preface

Much of what MDRC has learned about interventions for people who have dropped out of high school points toward the need to prevent school failure in the first place. As the nation seeks to ensure the effectiveness of its schools, we and others have argued that it is important to focus on the points of transition. How can schools improve the transition to kindergarten from Head Start, day care, or a state's pre-kindergarten program? How can the school-to-career transition be supported? And the question animating this report: How can high schools assist the transition from middle school, particularly for students at risk of school failure?

This is a report on the implementation and effects of Project Transition. Project Transition combines strategies that are becoming more common in K-12 settings across the nation: student-teacher clusters, extra time for teachers to work together, and a teacher "coach" meant to support instructional change. When implemented as a package, such an intervention tries to respond to two issues. First, can school be changed in ways that make students and teachers feel less anonymous and more engaged? Second, can this translate into improved student performance?

Because the elements of Project Transition are promising and are in the family of reforms being tried in a variety of schools, several years ago we decided to shine a hard light on what such a package might produce. To do so, we launched Project Transition's implementation in two large, urban high schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Kansas City, Kansas.

The report finds that Project Transition succeeded in creating a more supportive atmosphere for both students and teachers. At the school where the project was more fully implemented, it also produced positive though modest effects on students' academic outcomes. Given the strong research design underlying these results, the study provides reliable evidence on what such interventions can accomplish in a very short period of time. The report also clearly lays out the limits of such a strategy. As with all educational change, an intervention planned is not an intervention delivered. Further, this study shows that while a rather inexpensive but well-run intervention can improve important aspects of school performance, the effects are not dramatic. This underscores the need to consider well-implemented transition programs as just one element, albeit an important one, of a broader K-12 strategy.

We are grateful to the administrators, staff, and students at the sites and to the funders who supported Project Transition and this evaluation: the Ford Foundation, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Helen Bader Foundation, Joyce Foundation, and Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR, supported by the U. S. Department of Education), and the Kansas City, Kansas, Public Schools and the Milwaukee Public Schools.

Judith M. Gueron
President

Acknowledgments

Above all, the authors of this report are indebted to the teachers, administrators, and students at Pulaski and Schlagle High Schools. Their willingness to share their time, classrooms, and experiences and perceptions with the researchers was essential to our understanding of the unfolding of Project Transition at the two schools, and we appreciate their thoughtful feedback on an earlier draft of the report. While the list of school personnel at both schools is too long to acknowledge every staff member individually, we would be remiss if we did not note the special contributions made by Michael Sonnenberg, Richard Endres, and Bob Nerad at Pulaski, and also of Dee Sitzberger and Bettyann Brugger, who performed vital liaison functions when the resource support teacher left the project. At Schlagle, we are especially grateful to Mary Stewart, Emmerson Payne, Douglas Bolden, and Virginia Anderson.

The project would not have been possible without the aid and cooperation of key administrators and staff within the Milwaukee Public Schools and the Kansas City, Kansas, Public Schools, who strongly supported the research and made vital school records data available to us. In Milwaukee, we especially thank Cynthia Ellwood, Steve Baruch, and George Rennicke. In Kansas City, the efforts of Bonnie Lesley, Jim Jarrett, Larry Englebrick, Daryl Carlson, Mary Kay Graham, and Steve Rose are much appreciated.

Julie Stoffels, then of Alverno College, and Addye Hawkins of the Learning Exchange provided useful perspectives on the implementation process.

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The student survey used in this study is a modified version of a survey developed by Jim Connell, who also provided useful guidance on its analysis.

A double dose of gratitude is due Edward Pauly. While at MDRC, he was instrumental in developing the demonstration design. Subsequently, as an outside reviewer, he offered trenchant and helpful comments on the report. Mary Hinton, formerly of MDRC, was crucial in guiding the implementation of Project Transition in Kansas City.

We thank also Anthony Alvarado, Thomas Bailey, Mary Jo Bane, Richard Murnane, Charles Payne, and Melissa Roderick for their careful and thoughtful critiques of an earlier draft.

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by Galina Farberova, secured and processed the school records data. Julie O'Brien provided expert programming and analyzed the teacher survey data. Ramona M. Ortega and Anne Sweeney ably attended to the myriad details for report production. Fred Doolittle, Judith M. Gueron, James Kemple, Charles Michalopoulos, and Susan Poglinco provided useful reviews of the research design, results, and report.

Jean Akers edited the report with assistance from Robert Weber. Stephanie Cowell was responsible for word processing.

The Authors

Executive Summary

Increasingly in today's society, a high school diploma is a key to future economic prospects. In particular, it opens the door to postsecondary education. Yet many young people perform poorly in high school or drop out, with dropout rates being particularly high for students from families in poverty. To date, dropout recovery programs have had mostly discouraging results, and there is a pressing need for school reforms that *prevent* students' low achievement and failure in high school.

This report presents findings on the implementation and impacts of Project Transition, a research and demonstration program implemented at Pulaski High School in Milwaukee, during the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years, and in Schlagle High School in Kansas City, Kansas, during the 1996-97 school year. The program was designed to test the effectiveness of a set of reforms intended to improve students' attendance and performance in the first year of high school (typically 9th grade). That is a pivotal time in which many students, particularly in urban areas, start on the path toward low achievement and dropping out.[1]

Project Transition implemented three primary strategies to change in the environment of 9th-grade students and their teachers. It established student-teacher teams of four core academic teachers (for math, English, science, and history or geography) and approximately 120 students who share many of the same core classes; introduced daily teacher team meetings for collaboration on professional development and on solutions to student problems; and created a coach position and other supports to aid teachers' professional development and efforts to improve instructional practice. Program developers expected these changes to alter students' and teachers' attitudes and behavior in ways that would help students make a successful transition from middle school to high school and ultimately improve their attendance and performance.

Project Transition was developed and evaluated by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), a private nonprofit organization that designs and studies initiatives to improve the well-being and self-sufficiency of low-income populations, including youth at risk of school failure. In developing Project Transition, MDRC held discussions with school administrators, education reform experts, key education constituency groups, policymakers, teachers, and students. MDRC introduced the reform to the two schools and provided ongoing technical assistance. In addition, MDRC designed and carried out the research agenda and provided feedback to the sites during the course of program operations. Project Transition was supported by five funders — the Ford Foundation, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Helen Bader Foundation, Joyce Foundation, and Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR), supported by the U.S. Department of Education — and the two participating school districts.

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[1]Robert Felner, Judith Primavera, and Ana Cauce, 1981, "The Impact of School Transitions: A Focus for Preventative Efforts," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 9(4): 449-459.

The remainder of this Executive Summary presents the Project Transition findings in brief, introduces a prototype of the project, and describes Project Transition's primary components and how they were intended to function. Next, it discusses the actual implementation at each of the two site and presents Project Transition's impacts on students. Finally, it discusses some implications of the findings.

I. Findings in Brief

- **Project Transition was more fully implemented at Schlagle High School than at Pulaski High School.**

All the elements of the project were fully in place for the entire demonstration at Schlagle, whereas at Pulaski, only the daily teacher team meeting component was. There were also qualitative differences in the program as implemented as each site. For example, the coach at Schlagle was more effective in engendering change in teachers.

- **Project Transition created a more supportive environment at both Pulaski and Schlagle for students and teachers alike.**

At Pulaski, students generally did not know their peers at the beginning of high school, and survey findings indicate that more Project Transition students (than their pre-Project Transition counterparts) reported knowing many of their classmates and feeling supported and respected by them. At Schlagle, where students probably knew more of their classmates at the start of school, the effects of Project Transition were reflected in students' improved relationships with teachers. For example, survey findings indicate that more Project Transition students (than their pre-Project Transition counterparts) reported that their teachers cared about them and held high expectations for them.

The field research at both sites indicated that clustering students in teacher-student teams and creating small groups of students who shared multiple classes facilitated students' adjustment to high school. The teacher-student teams enabled each teacher in a team to see the same students the other teachers on his or her team did. Daily team meetings provided teachers with time to share information about students and to collectively address students' problems. The daily team meetings — and in some cases the coach — also served to combat teacher isolation and to foster collaboration among teachers.

- **Project Transition achieved positive effects on selected student academic outcomes at Schlagle, where it was more fully implemented.**

At Schlagle, more students passed their courses — and thus increased their average number of credits earned — than did their pre-Project Transition counterparts. The increase in credits earned, though fairly small, was concentrated among students who had relatively low attendance rates in middle school. Project Transition did not have notable impacts on attendance or grade point averages (GPAs) at either school. However, students reported other positive effects at Schlagle: greater feelings of autonomy and higher levels of engagement in school (relative to their pre-Project Transition counterparts).

When interpreting the program's results, it is important to keep in mind that the study lasted two years at Pulaski and one year at Schlagle. The program might show more positive results at both sites over a longer period of time. In addition, the evaluation followed students only through 9th grade. It is possible that Project Transition, having changed the environment in 9th grade, will have effects on students that extend beyond that year.

II. The Project Transition Demonstration

A. Prototype of Project Transition

Project Transition was based on an earlier intervention that sought to counteract the negative effects of transitions to high school. The School Transitional Environment Program (STEP), designed by Robert Felner and his colleagues at Yale University as a 9th-grade program, consisted of the following reform components: creation of a stable cluster of 60 to 100 9th-grade students and four teachers of the primary academic classes; arrangement of the primary classes in close physical proximity to each other; and the use of a STEP teacher during homeroom to provide guidance and administrative counseling.

Felner and his colleagues conducted a number of studies of STEP and found both short- and long-term positive effects, including higher grades and attendance rates in the 9th grade[2] and significant positive differences in dropout rates, GPAs, and attendance rates later in high school. The findings demonstrated that creating a successful transition to high school could increase students' educational success.[3]

In part, the Project Transition demonstration was developed to replicate certain features of the STEP program on a wider scale and to subject them to further evaluation. In creating Project Transition, MDRC incorporated the cluster structure of the STEP program (which is common to many "school-within-a-school" interventions) and also sought to foster closer personal teacher-student relationships. In addition, whereas both STEP and Project Transition sought to create a more supportive environment for students, Project Transition also included the resources intended to create a more supportive environment for teachers' growth and staff development.

B. Components of Project Transition

Project Transition was designed to benefit students in large urban high schools that draw students from several feeder schools and have a history of high dropout rates and poor student performance. Within these settings, it was to be implemented for all students in their first year of high school, except those in special programs with schedules that precluded their participation. Figure 1.1 shows how the program's three reform elements — teacher-student teams with shared

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[2]Robert D. Felner, Melanie Ginter, and Judith Primavera, 1982, "Primary Prevention During School Transitions: Social Support and Environmental Structure," *America Journal of Community Psychology* 19(3):277-290.

[3]Robert D. Felner et al., 1993, "Restructuring the Ecology of the School as an Approach to Prevention During School Transitions: Longitudinal Follow-Ups and Extensions of the School Transitional Environment Project (STEP)," *Prevention in Human Services* 10(2):103-136.

schedules, daily teacher team meetings, and a coach and other supports — were intended to engender positive behavioral and attitudinal responses among teachers and students. In turn, program planners hypothesized that these responses would affect such academic outcomes as students' grades and credits earned, attendance, and disciplinary incidents.

The following sections explain how the components of Project Transition provided opportunities and resources for professional development, which came to be specifically viewed as the improvement of teacher practice. Project Transition planners did not prescribe specific instructional methods but, rather, that teachers, with the involvement of the coach, would identify and pursue methods of their own choosing.

- **Teacher-student teams with shared schedules**

Teacher-student teams were established by grouping together four teachers, each from one of the core academic subjects (math, English, science, and history or geography) and approximately 120 students (the equivalent of four classes of 30 students each). This system allowed all four teachers in a team to share the same students. Whereas students in traditional high schools often feel little support from educational staff during their first year of high school,[4] the creation of teacher-student clusters was aimed at enabling teacher teams to work together with one group of students and to come to know them well, thus increasing students' sense of support.

Within the student-teacher teams, student schedules were to be structured so that each student had a group of a dozen or so peers who shared the same schedule for the four core classes. This arrangement is referred to as shared scheduling. Research suggests that during the transition year, many students feel anonymous and isolated because they know and are known by only a small proportion of their classmates, which reduces the support they receive from peers.[5] For students, teaming combined with shared scheduling aimed to create small, stable groups of classmates who acted as support networks.

More specifically, shared schedules would ensure that the average student had a group of approximately 14 classmates with whom she or he had attended all four academic classes. A full class (approximately 30 students) comprised two groups of 15 from the same team, but the groups were paired differently for each core class. In this way, entire classrooms of students would not follow the exact same schedule for their core subjects, yet students would have a stable group of peers.

The student-teacher teams with shared schedules were to be in place only for the four academic subjects. For lunch and the other four class periods in the school day (consisting of electives, required classes such as physical education, and in some cases study hall), schedules were not prescribed, and students had the opportunity to interact with others.

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[4]E. Seidman et al., 1996, "The Impact of the Transition to High School on the Self-System and Perceived Social Context of Poor Urban Youth," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 24(4): 489-515.

[5]Felner, Primavera, and Cauce, 1981.

- **Daily teacher team meetings**

In the traditional high school structure, teachers have few opportunities to interact with their colleagues regarding classroom instruction, students, and creative problem-solving. As envisioned by Project Transition planners, the daily teacher team meetings — to last the equivalent of one class period — represented a change in this structure and sought to achieve two principal objectives. First, they would provide a forum in which teachers, who were working with the same group of students, could collaborate to identify and resolve students' problems before these became overwhelming. Second, they would create an environment in which teachers were active participants in their own professional development to improve instructional methods and to respond to the specific challenges faced in the classroom. The meetings were intended to encourage teachers to reinforce, review, and revise their efforts as part of an ongoing process.

- **Coach and other supports**

The Project Transition coach position was envisioned as a primary support role to be filled by an experienced, full-time person. The coach would be a nonsupervisory peer for the Project Transition teachers, whose main function would be to enhance their professional development.

The coach position was unusual in that it was intended to provide a source of intensive, one-on-one assistance and stimulation typically unavailable to teachers. Program planners hypothesized that the coach would facilitate teacher collaboration by modeling encouragement, feedback, and constructive criticism to the teacher teams and by helping teachers reflect on their current practice, improve their instructional methods, and identify effective strategies for engaging students in coursework and supporting students who fell behind.

Planners anticipated that the coach's specific duties would vary in response to teachers' needs but would include facilitating teacher team meetings; observing classes, including demonstration of lessons; organizing of professional development opportunities for teachers; and facilitating lesson sharing among teachers. In addition, a school's specific instructional or curricular foci, such as cooperative learning and career exploration, were considered areas for the coach's input.

Secondary supports provided in Project Transition included the learning resource partner; mandatory summer institutes, consisting of several days of professional development and planning; and supplementary funds for use by the teacher teams for professional development resources. The learning resource partner was a local institution or agency that would support the Project Transition coach and provide ongoing technical assistance and professional development for the teachers.

C. An Overview of the Demonstration Sites

Both Pulaski and Schlagle were large comprehensive high schools in urban school districts. The schools were composed of 9th through 12th grades and had high percentages of students of color and students receiving free or subsidized lunch (see Table 1). Both sites had characteristics — such as a high percentage of students with low GPAs, a high percentage of drop-

outs, and a decline in student GPAs and attendance from 8th to 9th grade — that Project Transition was intended to influence, and thus were considered viable sites for the demonstration. In addition, Pulaski had particularly high absence rates.

As a consequence of a student choice program, students came to Pulaski from many different middle schools within the district. During the demonstration period, students from approximately 20 (middle or K-8) schools attended Pulaski, and no more than 10 percent of the 9th-grade class came from the same school. Thus, Pulaski students made the transition from their middle school knowing relatively few of their classmates. In contrast, nearly 70 percent of Schlagle students came from four middle schools in the district (with about half of the students arriving from two of those schools) and were thus likely to have entered Schlagle knowing many of their classmates.

Table 1

Ninth-Grade Characteristics for Pre-PT Groups

	Pulaski	Schlagle
Race/ethnicity (%)		
Black	51.0	77.0
Hispanic	8.0	2.0
Other	41.0	21.0
Receive free or reduced price lunch (%)	62.0	50[a]
GPA	1.32	2.06
Absence rate (%)	30.9	16.6

SOURCE: Student records from Milwaukee and Kansas City Public Schools.

[a] This figure is approximate and not available from Kansas City Public Schools student records.

The schools' teaching staffs also had the potential to be affected by Project Transition. Before the demonstration, team structures did not exist at either sites, so teachers were not accustomed to teaching the same students their colleagues taught. In addition, there was little evidence of teacher collaboration at either Pulaski or Schlagle.

D. Implementation Time Frame

The demonstration began at Pulaski with a planning phase during the 1994-95 school year. Project Transition was implemented at Pulaski and studied by MDRC during 1995-96 and 1996-97. Schlagle's planning phase began in the latter part of the 1994-95 school year and continued throughout the 1995-96 school year, while Project Transition was being implemented at Pulaski. Implementation and effects of Project Transition were studied by MDRC at Schlagle for a single school year, 1996-97. The intervention was planned originally as a one-year research and demonstration project for both sites. Near the end of the first year at Pulaski, MDRC, Pulaski

staff, the Milwaukee Public Schools, and the project's funders decided to extend the demonstration for a second year to allow for more complete implementation and a more thorough test of the intervention. Thus, the second year of the demonstration at Pulaski coincided with the first year at Schlagle.

E. Costs of the Demonstration

The primary costs of Project Transition included the team meeting time and funding for the coach and other supports. The daily teacher team meetings were created by reducing the teaching load of the 12 Project Transition teachers by one class period. In order to prevent redistributing classes and thus increasing class size, the participating districts provided funding for additional personnel to cover the loss of classroom teaching time of the Project Transition teachers. The coach's salary and fringe benefits were equivalent to their salaries as classroom teachers in the district. Thus, the cost of the coach varied according to the particular district's salary guide and the teaching experience of the individual. For the demonstration, MDRC provided the funding for the coach's salary and fringe benefits for two school years in each site. MDRC also provided the funding for the activities of the learning resource partner and for teacher professional development, including the costs of the initial summer institute at each site.

F. Project Transition Evaluation: Data Sources and Research Methods

Several data sources were used to evaluate the implementation of Project Transition. The implementation experiences were assessed during the demonstration period using field research — including a mix of observations, interviews, and focus groups conducted at the two schools — as well as telephone updates by MDRC researchers. Field research at the sites began with the project's implementation. Although there were data on the planning process, the field research did not encompass the experiences of teachers' or students' pre-Project Transition counterparts.

In order to estimate Project Transition's effects on students, data were obtained from two sources. First, a survey was administered to each group of students during the spring semester of their 9th-grade year. The Student Survey contains a range of questions designed to capture students' perceptions of the quality of their relationships with peers and teachers, their ability to do well in school, and their engagement in school. Second, school records data were provided by the Milwaukee and Kansas City Public Schools systems. School records contained demographic information for each student and data on grades, credits earned, and attendance during the 9th grade.

Project Transition's effects on students were estimated using a *cohort comparison design*, in which each year's entering 9th-grade class is referred to as a *cohort*. At Schlagle, for example, data were obtained for two cohorts: the 9th-grade class in the year before Project Transition's implementation (school year 1995-96) and the 9th-grade class in the year of Project Transition's implementation (school year 1996-97), referred to as the pre-Project Transition and Project Transition groups, respectively. Data for the pre-Project Transition group provide an estimate of the typical experiences and school performance of 9th graders at Schlagle in the absence of Project Transition. The differences in student experiences and performance, or outcomes, between the pre-Project Transition and Project Transition groups represent the *impacts*, or effects, of Project Transition.

A potential limitation of the cohort comparison design is that unforeseen historical events may compromise the validity of the impact estimates. For example, if a new curriculum is introduced during the years in which Project Transition is implemented, it becomes difficult to attribute differences in student outcomes across cohorts to Project Transition, because they may rather be due to the curriculum change. Another example, especially relevant to Pulaski, is an event that changes the types of students who attend the school. Changes in district policy during the second year of Project Transition's implementation caused many students who typically would have entered 9th grade at other high schools to attend Pulaski instead. Data from the school records indicate that these students had somewhat higher grades in middle school, so it is possible they were more engaged in school than the "average" Pulaski student. This change suggests that the estimated effects of Project Transition at Pulaski may be positively biased. Although the method of estimating program impacts accounts for differences across cohorts on several measures of school performance before 9th grade, the impacts presented for Pulaski should be interpreted with caution.

III. Findings on the Implementation of Project Transition at Pulaski High School

A. Planning Process

- **The planning process at Pulaski was relatively short and lacked strong initial ownership by Pulaski teachers.**

After MDRC and the district selected Pulaski High School for implementation, MDRC staff presented the project to Pulaski staff, who voted on whether to move forward with the project. Sixty percent of the faculty voted to do so. This was lower than the 70 percent benchmark set by MDRC, the Pulaski administration, and district officials as necessary for implementation. However, the principal was eager for the project to move forward and persuaded influential faculty members to accept it. Next, district and school administrators, in conjunction with MDRC, identified personnel to participate in Project Transition. The majority of the Project Transition teachers volunteered to participate in the program (although some needed a measure of persuasion by school administrators). Once identified, Pulaski staff had about six months (excluding the summer break) to plan for the new demonstration. Teachers and administrators interviewed the two applicants for the coach position. The candidate hired as the Project Transition coach had previously been a mentor teacher within the Milwaukee Public Schools system.

Alverno College, a local undergraduate institution with a focus on teaching, was chosen as the learning resource partner, and a professor from Alverno was selected as its representative. Alverno was widely known throughout the area for its professional development programs for teachers and for its particular focus on alternative methods of student performance assessment.

B. Teacher-Student Teams with Shared Student Schedules

- **Students generally favored shared schedules, but teachers were less likely to perceive benefits.**

Three teacher-student teams consisting of approximately 120 students and their four core subject teachers existed for the duration of the demonstration period. Within each team, shared student schedules existed for only the second year of the demonstration.

Students in focus groups indicated initial positive reactions to shared schedules, reporting that it facilitated their entry into a new school; provided them with a ready set of classmates with whom to establish friendships; helped them develop feelings of security; and in some cases, made it easier to study with or request help from peers. As the school year progressed, students became more ambivalent about shared schedules. They still perceived advantages to the arrangement but expressed boredom and a desire to meet more people as well. In contrast to students' generally favorable reactions, teachers for the most part did not perceive any important benefits for students; rather, they felt shared schedules encouraged immature behavior and was socially restrictive.

C. Daily Teacher Team Meetings

- **The daily teacher team meetings functioned stably throughout the demonstration period, with content focused on student problems or integrated curriculum units.**

The teacher team meetings were well received by Project Transition teachers, who viewed their meeting time as an opportunity to escape the isolation of the classroom and to offer and receive mutual support. Topics for team meetings were determined by teachers, and the coach rarely facilitated the meetings. Although some teams were more focused than others, all teams spent much of their time discussing either "problem" students or instruction related to integrated curriculum units.

Teachers generally viewed problem behavior and poor academic performance as arising from students' home situations, or from other forces outside the classroom, and largely beyond their control. Discussion of students typically centered on students' personal problems and strategies to support the students or help solve the problems. Teachers spent relatively little team meeting time talking about educational or instructional methods that might affect students' work or behavior. When teachers did talk about setting common expectations for students, they more often spoke of behavioral than of academic expectations.

Discussion of integrated curriculum units focused on the development and execution of the units or of field trips. Teachers enjoyed collaborating on units, and two of the three teams made extensive use of them. On the whole, teachers reported that the experience of being involved in integrated projects was satisfying for students and teachers alike.

D. Coach and Other Supports

- **The coach and learning resource partner were generally not well received by teachers and were regarded as ineffective in stimulating change.**

A few teachers reported that the coach was helpful, mostly in a capacity resembling his former role as a mentor teacher — but generally he was perceived as less effective than he might have been. Midway through the second year of the demonstration, the coach departed to take an-

other position in the district, and the vacant position was not refilled. Instead, funds for the coach position were used to support paraprofessionals assigned to each team.

One difficulty facing the coach was the lack of consensus among the teachers about how he could help them. Teachers' ideas of specific tasks the coach could perform were wide-ranging in purpose and in level of required expertise. For example, some teachers expected the coach to handle such duties as the logistics for field trips. On another level, one teacher regretted that the coach did not model lessons in her subject area — in this case, an area in which he did not have substantive expertise. Some teachers also resisted the coach's attempts to observe their classrooms. Additionally, the coach himself defined his role passively as an enabler of the teachers rather than as an agent of change, and was thus perceived to be ineffective in bringing about reform in teacher practice.

Teachers reported that, overall, the learning resource partner was perceived to have a minimal impact on the project. A combination of other commitments, little support for or from the coach, and an early conflict with one team teacher may explain her minimal contribution.

E. Summary

Pulaski staff believed that Project Transition helped the school move toward a more personalized environment for both teachers and students as well as toward more hands-on learning. The team meetings increased the degree of interaction among the Project Transition teachers in a school in which isolation was the norm. This interaction manifested itself primarily in the discussion of student problems and the creation and use of integrated curriculum units by two of the three teams. Some Project Transition teachers altered and expanded their instructional practices, especially in response to the introduction of integrated units, but is appears that Project Transition was not a catalyst for instructional change to the degree some parties to the demonstration had hoped.

IV. Findings on the Implementation of Project Transition at Schlagle High School

A. Planning Process

- **Faculty and administration at Schlagle were actively involved in the planning process and helped generate support for the project.**

The Kauffman Foundation (the major local funder of Project Transition) helped to generate the district's interest and support for the project. A reform that focused on creating student "houses" or schools-within-schools, similar to Project Transition's teacher-student teams, had been implemented previously in some schools in the district. School district officials identified Schlagle, which had not been affected by that reform, as an appropriate site for the demonstration. Having learned from the Pulaski intervention, MDRC staff and Schlagle administrators constructed a process that encouraged full participation by teachers in the planning of Project Transition's implementation. Schlagle teachers were engaged early on in extensive discussions about all the elements of Project Transition, and a quarter of the school's faculty signed up to

serve on a planning committee. One of the committee's main tasks was to identify what school personnel considered the problems facing 9th graders. In identifying areas they wished to affect, Schlagle personnel came to understand how the Project Transition framework could be used as a vehicle to help solve these problems. The committee members also became responsible for advocating for the project among the entire faculty, and ultimately the faculty vote to accept Project Transition was unanimous.

Near the end of the lengthy planning process, which lasted about 14 months (three semesters), school administrators selected the teachers to participate in Project Transition from a group of volunteers. The Learning Exchange, a known and respected technical assistance provider with experience in teacher-centered professional development, was designated the learning resource partner. Input from district officials and the Kauffman Foundation, as well as the Learning Exchange's previous professional development activities at Schlagle, contributed to the selection of the Learning Exchange as the learning resource partner. A Learning Exchange employee was chosen to be their representative during the Project Transition demonstrations.

Teachers interviewed four applicants for the coach's position, and the assistant principal and the Learning Exchange's representative observed the two finalists in their classrooms. The person hired was a middle-school teacher in the district who had more than 30 years of teaching experience including experience with teacher teaming. The representative from the learning resource partner had previously worked with the person selected as coach, and they had established a good working relationship before their involvement with Project Transition.

B. Teacher-Student Teams with Shared Student Schedules

- **Over time, both students and teachers perceived benefits from as well as drawbacks to shared schedules.**

Three teacher-student teams whose students shared schedules were created at the start of the demonstration and existed throughout the year. According to focus groups, student reactions to shared schedules were positive at the very beginning of the school year, because this scheduling helped students adjust to their new surroundings. However, within a few months, students reported that they were tired of seeing the same people so much and desired more opportunities to meet other students. They also reported discomfort with the ease with which gossip and rumors circulated within their peer networks. As students became further accustomed to the team arrangement, their complaints lessened. At the start of the year, teachers perceived benefits to teacher-student teams and shared schedules. They believed that students could get to know each other better, and they also a perceived a decrease in misconduct in the hallways and in tardy arrival at subsequent classes. Later in the school year, however, teachers reported that they were sensitive to both student boredom with the same peer group and their reduced contact with students outside their team.

C. Daily Teacher Team Meetings

- **The daily teacher team meetings evolved over the course of the project to expand from a focus on student behavior to a wider variety of topics, including student academic achievement.**

During team meetings, teachers engaged in discussions about a variety of issues, such as the formulation of team goals; their expectations about student behavior and academic performance; coordination of new policies and activities; assessment of professional development needs; and evaluations of classroom proceedings, including student progress and behavior.

Although teachers initially viewed teaming primarily as a way to manage student behavior, they gradually began to focus on student academic achievement. An increased focus on academics was encouraged by the coach, the assistant principal, and the learning resource partner's representative (also referred to as the Project Transition leadership), and combined with practical professional development to address ways to strengthen classroom practice.

D. Coach and Other Supports

- **The coach and learning resource partner were instrumental in engaging teachers in the process of examining and, in some cases, altering instructional practice.**

The coach's major activities were to facilitate teacher team meetings, to visit classrooms, and to plan professional development activities. The coach's role was accepted by teachers, who were receptive to her ideas and input, which also included constructive criticism. Virtually all teachers reported that the coach fulfilled a useful purpose in Project Transition, served as a source of support, and helped them to develop as teachers.

The coach was heavily supported by Schlagle's assistant principal, who often cofacilitated team meetings, collaborated with the coach in discussions of individual teachers' progress and in planning professional development activities, and handled operational details of the project.

The chief role of the learning resource partner's representative was to assist Schlagle staff in professional development activities. She focused on encouraging teachers to use innovative classroom practices, particularly cooperative learning techniques. The learning resource partner's representative shared written materials with teachers and modeled instructional and management techniques for them. These activities occurred primarily while she cofacilitated (with the coach and assistant principal) the full-group team meetings (consisting of all 12 Project Transition teachers), which were generally held twice a month after school, or when she participated in the quarterly Project Transition staff retreats.

Teachers received feedback about their classroom performance and acted on suggestions they received to improve their classroom practice. Specifically, the Project Transition leadership encouraged teachers to use cooperative learning and interdisciplinary units as new teaching techniques. The Project Transition leadership provided support and instruction (often in the form of one-on-one interaction with the coach or learning resource partner's representative) on how to use cooperative learning in classrooms, which each teacher had tried by the end of the school year. All teams developed interdisciplinary units during their team meetings, and one team developed collaborative lesson plans.

E. Summary

All the Project Transition components were in place from the outset at Schlagle, but the roles, activities, and priorities of the students and teachers, the learning resource partner, and the assistant principal evolved throughout the demonstration period. Although teachers ultimately felt supported by their fellow team members, and reported that their sense of teacher isolation was replaced with a stronger sense of community, the examination of teacher practice was a challenging process. Some teachers strove to increase their sense of efficacy, but others cited students' lack of motivation as a reason for low achievement. Teachers sometimes expressed frustration when they raised their expectations of students and students did not respond as expected. Differing perspectives and experiences during the intervention caused teachers to challenge each other, and team meetings sometimes became confrontational. Over the course of the year, some teachers made strong progress in classroom management and in instructional techniques. Others began to actively evaluate status quo practices within schools and within the teaching profession as well as their own connection to these practices.

V. MDRC's Approach to Implementation

Because activities at Schlagle began nearly a year later than at Pulaski, MDRC staff benefited from their experience at Pulaski, which helped guide the introduction of Project Transition to Schlagle staff as well as the subsequent implementation experience. MDRC's approach to implementation at Schlagle differed from that at Pulaski in two important ways. First, because of time constraints, the planning process at Pulaski was relatively short, whereas Schlagle had the advantage of a considerably longer planning period. In addition, MDRC engaged Schlagle staff in a thorough participatory planning process, but planning at Pulaski paid less attention to building substantial support for the project. Second, MDRC's primary goal for Project Transition evolved over time toward a focus on improving teacher instructional practice. MDRC also came to emphasize the coach's role as instrumental in encouraging teacher improvement. The goal of improving instructional practice was not explicitly addressed at Pulaski at the outset of the project; in MDRC's presentation of the project to Schlagle, it took on greater importance. The different approaches to the planning process at each school and the varying degrees of explicitness about instructional improvement as a goal may have contributed to the extent to which the project was implemented in each site.

VI. Findings on Project Transition's Impacts on Students

Project Transition's impacts on students were calculated from data gathered from both surveys and school records. As mentioned earlier, the program's impacts are calculated as differences in student outcomes for the pre-Project Transition and Project Transition groups. The impacts at Pulaski, which had two Project Transition groups, are presented for the second year of implementation, that is, for 9th graders in the 1996-97 school year. For ease of presentation, impacts are shown for a subset of the full range of outcomes analyzed. The impacts reported here, however, are representative of the program's overall effects.

When interpreting Project Transition effects, it is important to remember that the extent of implementation varied across the two schools, so that "Project Transition at Pulaski," for example, should be taken to mean Project Transition as it was implemented there. Also, as noted earlier, the impacts presented for Pulaski should be interpreted with caution, since a group of students who may have been atypical were enrolled in the school during the evaluation. Finally, only differences in student outcomes that are statistically significant at the 10 percent level are interpreted as program impacts. An impact that is statistically significant is considered to represent a true difference between the groups rather than a difference arising by chance. Significance at the 10 percent level implies that there is only a 10 percent likelihood that the difference is due to chance.

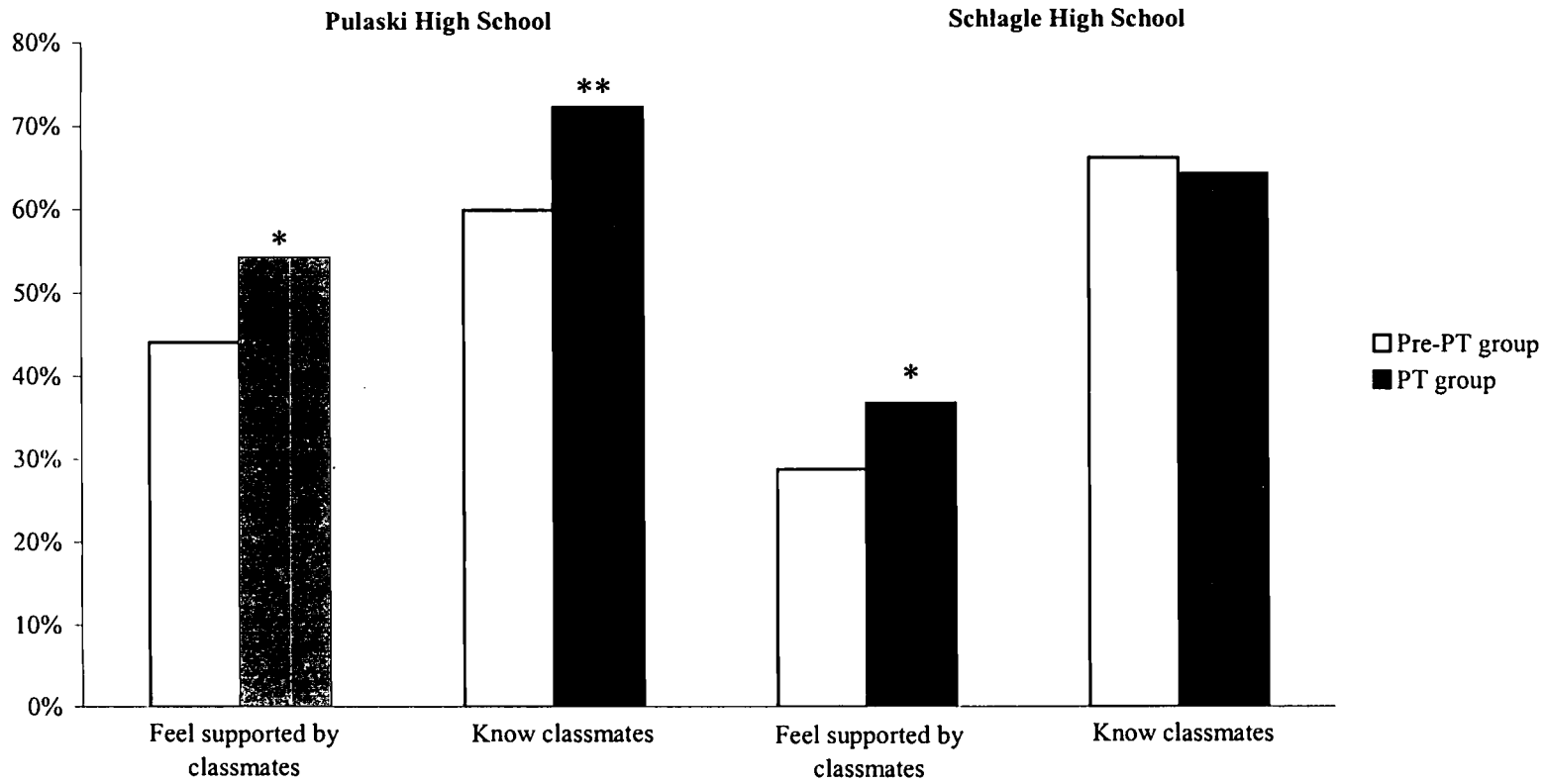
- **Project Transition created a more supportive school environment for students at both schools, in different ways. At Pulaski, it improved students' relationships with classmates, and at Schlagle, it improved students' relationships with teachers.**

The Student Survey contains several questions designed to measure the quality of students' relationships with classmates and teachers. For the analysis, student responses to each group of related questions were averaged to form a summary outcome measure. A high rating was defined as an average value above a certain threshold (the average value among students with low to moderate attendance rates). At Pulaski, Project Transition students reported higher ratings than did their pre-Project Transition counterparts on five of the six outcomes measuring relationships with classmates. Figure 1 reflects this pattern of impacts at Pulaski, showing the percentage of students providing high ratings on two of the six outcomes — the extent to which students feel supported by their classmates and the extent to which they know their classmates. (The remaining four outcomes measure the extent to which students feel that their classmates are not biased against them, they enjoy being with their classmates, their peer culture values proacademic behavior, and their peer culture values working hard in school.) The figure shows that 54 percent of students in the Project Transition group gave a high rating on the extent to which they feel supported by their classmates compared with 44 percent of students in the pre-Project Transition group, a difference that is statistically significant.

At Schlagle, in contrast, Project Transition produced inconsistent effects on students' relationships with peers. Students in the Project Transition group provided higher ratings than pre-Project Transition students on two of the six outcomes and lower ratings on one outcome; differences for the remaining three were not statistically significant. For example, Project Transition students at Schlagle reported higher levels of classmate support than did pre-Project Transition students, but they did not provide higher ratings on the extent to which they knew other students (see Figure 1). The difference in impacts across the two schools is probably due to the fact that student familiarity at Schlagle was already fairly high before the implementation of Project Transition, leaving less room for improvement. The majority of students who attended Schlagle came from four middle schools, whereas Pulaski students came from over 20 (middle or K-8) schools.

At Schlagle, Project Transition increased student ratings on four of the five outcomes measuring their relationships with teachers, but it had no significant effects on these outcomes at Pulaski. The results shown in Figure 2 are representative of this overall pattern. The figure shows

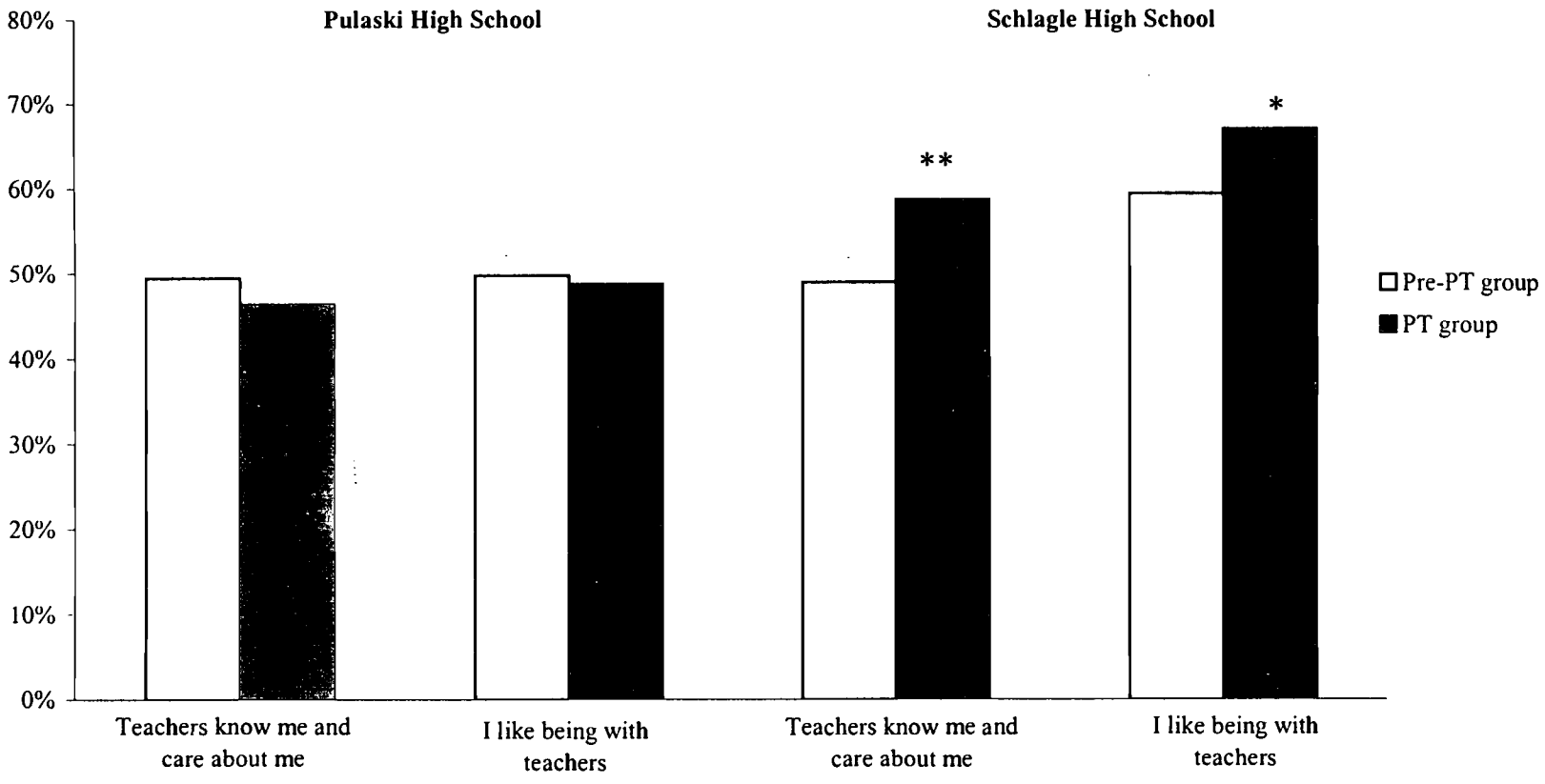
Figure 1
Impacts of Project Transition on Students' High Ratings of the Quality of Their Relationships with Classmates



SOURCE: Project Transition Student Survey.

NOTE: Asterisks indicate that the difference between the pre-PT and PT groups (the impact) is statistically significant (significance levels are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent).

Figure 2
Impacts of Project Transition on Students' High Ratings of the Quality of Their Relationships with Teachers



SOURCE: Project Transition Student Survey.

NOTE: Asterisks indicate that the difference between the pre-PT and PT groups (the impact) is statistically significant (significance levels are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent).

the percentage of students providing high ratings on two of the five outcomes — the extent to which students feel that their teachers care about them and the extent to which they like being with their teachers. (The remaining three outcomes measure the extent to which students feel that their teachers treat them fairly, their teachers have high academic expectations for them, and what they are learning in school is important for their future.) Project Transition at Schlagle increased ratings on both of these outcomes, whereas Project Transition at Pulaski had no statistically significant effect on either measure. For example, 67 percent of Project Transition students at Schlagle provided a high rating on the extent to which they liked being with teachers, compared with 59 percent of pre-Project Transition students.

- **Project Transition had positive effects on students' self-perceptions at Schlagle, but no measurable effect at Pulaski.**

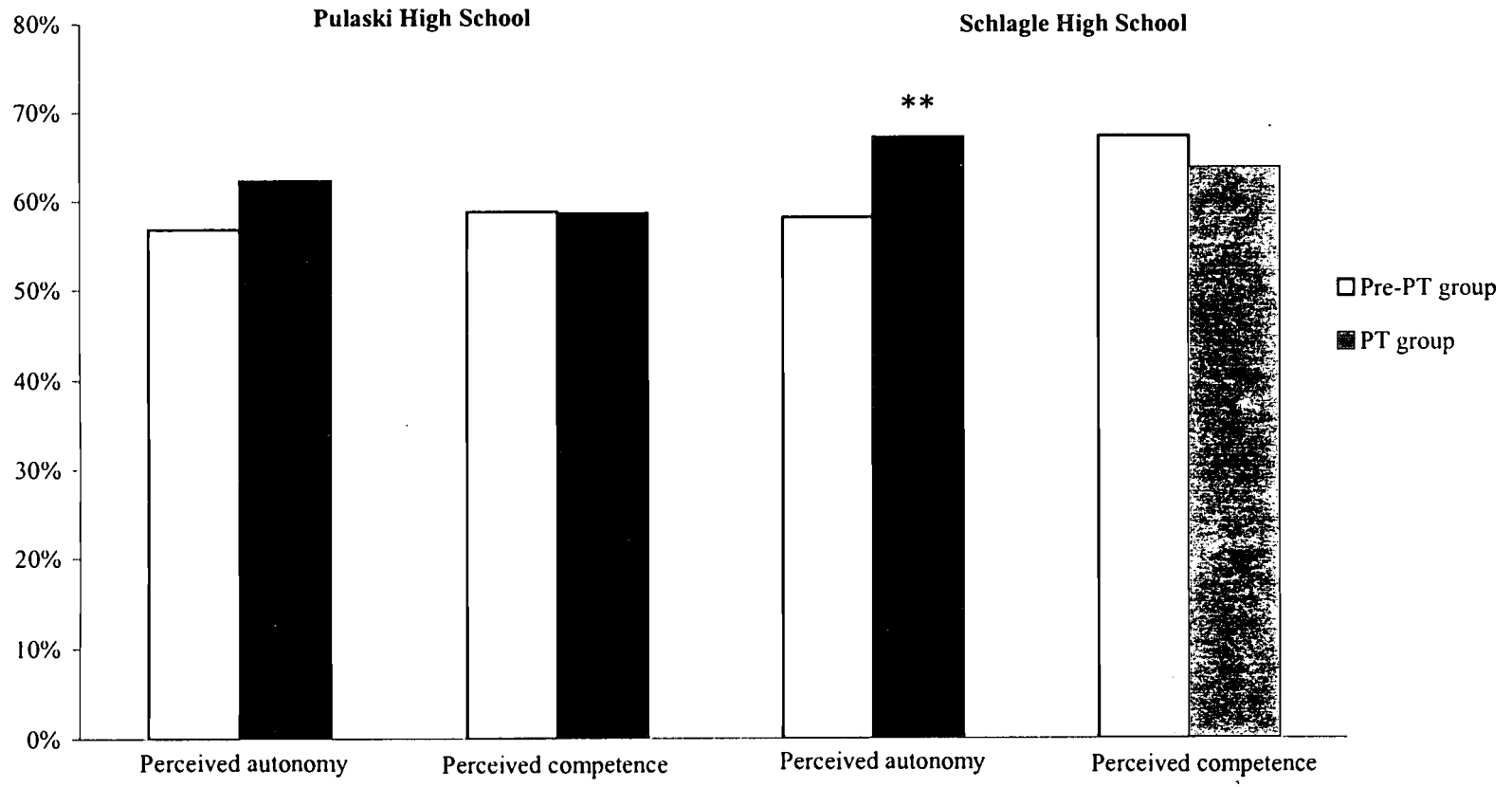
The Student Survey measured self-perceptions of students' academic ability and engagement in school, which were anticipated to improve in a more supportive environment. Figure 3 presents impacts on two of the four outcomes measured — the extent to which students do class work because they feel it is important (autonomy) and the extent to which they feel they have the ability to do well in school (competence). (The remaining two outcomes measure the extent to which students have constructive responses to problems they might have in school: the extent to which they do not assign blame to external factors, primarily teachers, and the extent to which they turn inward and attempt to solve the problem.)

Project Transition at Pulaski had no effects on any of the outcomes measuring students' self-perceptions (see Figure 3). Neither of the differences in ratings for perceived autonomy or perceived competence is statistically significant. Project Transition had modest effects at Schlagle, producing positive and significant impacts on two of the four outcomes. As shown in Figure 3, for example, 67 percent of Project Transition students provided high ratings for autonomy compared with 58 percent of pre-Project Transition students, and this difference is statistically significant. The difference for perceived competence, although negative, is not statistically significant.

Figure 4 presents impacts for the two outcomes measuring engagement in school — affective engagement (the extent to which students report that they like school) and behavioral engagement (the extent to which they report working hard in school). Project Transition at Pulaski did not have significant effects on student engagement, as measured by either outcome. At Schlagle, Project Transition had no measurable effect on affective engagement but produced a small increase in the percentage of students providing high ratings for behavioral engagement; 67 percent of Project Transition students provided high ratings for this outcome compared with 60 percent of pre-Project Transition students, a difference that is statistically significant at the 11 percent level.

- **Project Transition produced small effects on student achievement at Schlagle, primarily for those with relatively low attendance rates in middle school. Project Transition produced no measurable effects on student achievement at Pulaski.**

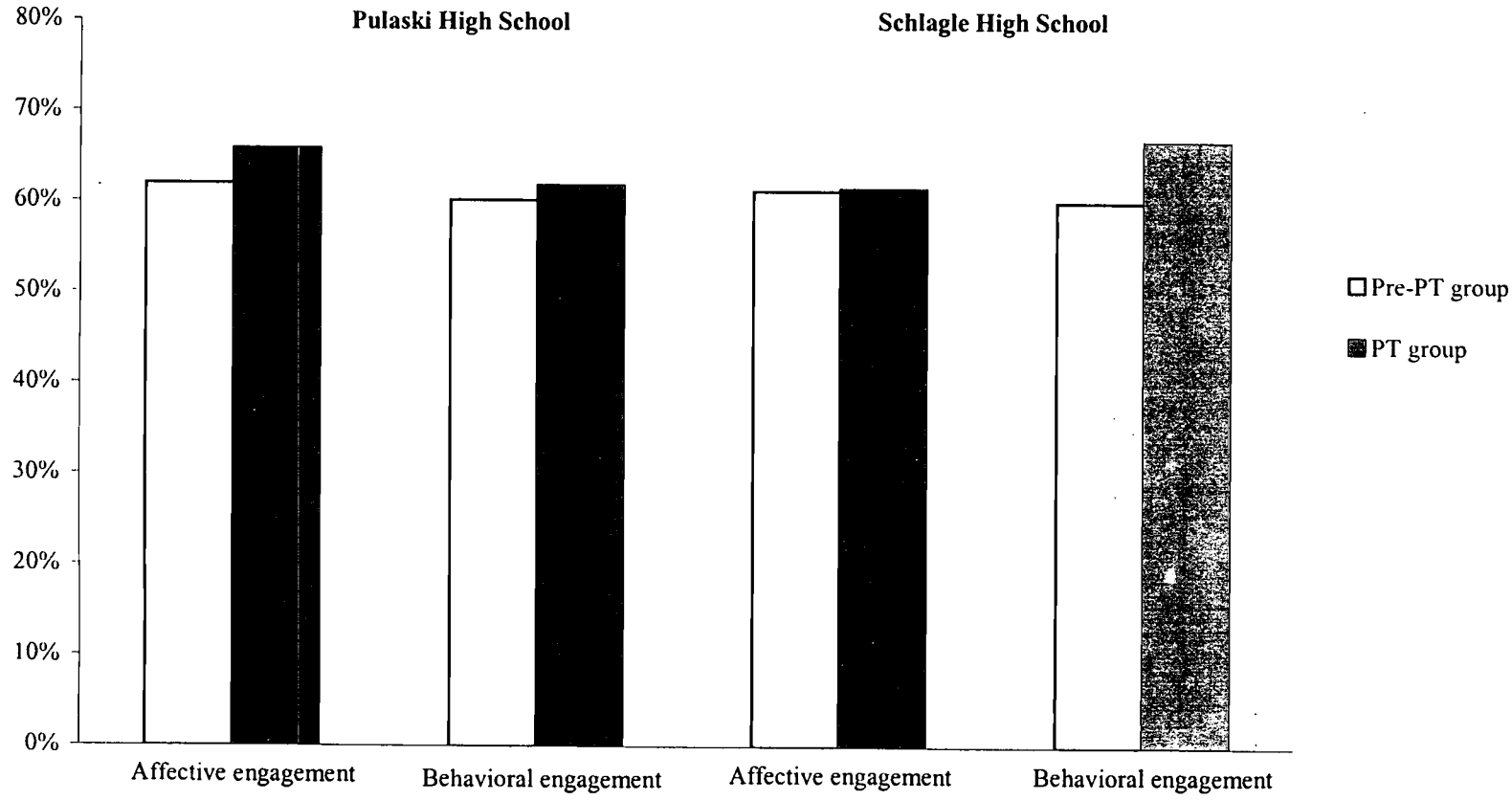
Figure 3
Impacts of Project Transition on Students' High Ratings on Self-Perceptions of Autonomy and Competence



SOURCE: Project Transition Student Survey.

NOTE: Asterisks indicate that the difference between the pre-PT and PT groups (the impact) is statistically significant (significance levels are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent).

Figure 4
Impacts of Project Transition on Students' High Ratings of Their Affective and Behavioral Engagement in School



SOURCE: Project Transition Student Survey.

NOTE: None of the differences shown in this figure are statistically significant.

Several measures of achievement in 9th grade are available from school records data. Tables 2 and 3 present outcomes and impacts for grades, credits earned, and attendance. (Other outcomes analyzed in the evaluation were dropout rates during 9th grade and the number of suspension referrals and suspensions. These data are available only for Schlagle.) At Pulaski, Project Transition produced no significant changes in grades or in the percentage of courses passed and did not reduce absence rates (see Table 2). For example, students in the pre-Project Transition group were absent on average 30.9 percent of the time, compared with 29.7 percent for Project Transition students. The difference, 1.3 percentage points, is not statistically significant. Impacts estimated for the subset of students thought to be at relatively greater risk for school failure — those with low attendance rates in 8th grade — were no different from those reported in Table 2.

The top panel of Table 3 presents impacts for all students at Schlagle, and the bottom panel for those with low 8th-grade attendance rates, considered to be at risk for school failure. Among all students, Project Transition had no effect on average GPA but did increase the percentage of students with higher than a D average; 80.7 percent of Project Transition students had a GPA higher than 1.0, compared with 74.5 percent of pre-Project Transition students, for a statistically significant difference of 6.2 percentage points. Consistent with this impact, Project Transition students passed their courses at a higher rate than did their pre-Project Transition counterparts.

The bottom panel shows that these impacts are more pronounced for students with low attendance rates before 9th grade. For example, Project Transition increased the rate at which they passed their courses by a statistically significant 9.6 percentage points. In fact, the impacts presented for the full sample of students are driven entirely by the impacts for this subset of students; there were no significant impacts on these outcomes for the group of students with high attendance before 9th grade or for those considered at lower risk for later school failure.

VII. Implications

- **Project Transition by itself had only modest effects on student outcomes, but it may serve as a foundation for other interventions.**

At a time when many large urban high schools are impersonal environments that foster a sense of isolation among both students and teachers, it is notable that Project Transition reduced the extent to which this was true at both Pulaski and Schlagle. By creating an amount of support that typically does not exist at public schools, Project Transition improved students' relationships with others in the school and reduced the sense of professional isolation that so many teachers experience. The elements of Project Transition may serve as important complements to other interventions. For example, a reform designed to introduce a new curriculum or teaching method might be more easily implemented and more successful if there were teacher teams and a coach to facilitate collaboration among teachers.

- **Educational reforms are, at best, difficult to implement, but several factors can positively affect change.**

Table 2
Impacts on Selected Measures of 9th-Grade Achievement for Project Transition Students at Pulaski High School

Measure	Pre-PT Group	PT Group[a]	Difference
Average GPA	1.32	1.38	0.06
Percentage with GPA higher than D average	58.3	57.1	-1.2
Percentage of courses passed[b]	60.1	63.0	2.9
Absence rate[c]	30.9	29.7	-1.3
Sample size	359	404	

SOURCE: Student records from the Milwaukee Public Schools.

NOTES: All impacts for each school are regression-adjusted using the baseline characteristics listed in Tables 5.3 and 5.4.

Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

[a]The PT group here is defined as Project Transition 9th graders in the second year of implementation.

[b]Percentage of courses passed is equal to credits earned divided by credits attempted.

[c]The absence rate is defined as days absent divided by days enrolled. The sample size for these measures is 391 for both pre-PT and PT groups.

Table 3
Impacts on Selected Measures of 9th-Grade Achievement for Project Transition Students at Schlagle High School

Measure	Pre-PT Group	PT Group[a]	Difference
All students			
Average GPA	1.92	1.95	0.04
Percentage with GPA higher than D average	74.5	80.7	6.2 **
Percentage of courses passed[b]	77.1	81.4	4.3 **
Sample size	368	395	
Absence rate[c]	16.6	15.3	-1.3
Sample size	398	437	
Students with low 8th-grade attendance			
Average GPA	1.27	1.37	0.10
Percentage with GPA higher than D average	54.1	64.2	10.1 *
Percentage of courses passed[b]	60.6	70.2	9.6 **
Sample size	118	128	
Absence rate[c]	28.1	25.6	-2.5
Sample size	132	143	

SOURCE: Student records from the Kansas City Public Schools.

NOTES: All impacts for each school are regression-adjusted using the baseline characteristics listed in Tables 5.3 and 5.4.

Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

[a]The PT group here is defined as Project Transition 9th graders in the second year of implementation.

[b]Percentage of courses passed is equal to credits earned divided by credits attempted.

[c]The absence rate is defined as days absent divided by days enrolled.

Project Transition combined structural changes and other resources envisioned to decrease student anonymity and support instructional change. Although Project Transition's implementation was less complete at Pulaski, the school's experience was by no means atypical of schools attempting to affect important changes. Indeed, the more successful implementation at Schlagle may be a less typical outcome of a school intervention experience. Nonetheless, the contrasting experiences suggest that several elements must exist if a reform is to be fully implemented.

First, teachers and administrators must have both the *incentive* and the *capacity* to change. This point is illustrated in several ways by the experience at Schlagle. The assistant principal's involvement in the project may have increased teachers' sense of accountability for the success of the project. In addition to guiding the planning effort, she frequently attended teacher team meetings and joined the coach in observing teachers in their classrooms. The assistant principal's strong support probably also increased the coach's ability to implement changes and the teachers' willingness to work with and take suggestions from her.

Additionally, two factors outside the school may have increased Schlagle's incentive to implement Project Transition. First, a similar type of reform, centered on student clustering, had been implemented in other schools in the district, with positive results. Thus, teachers at Schlagle, compared with their counterparts at Pulaski, may have viewed student clustering more favorably and been more willing to try it. Second, the local foundation that served as one of the funders of the demonstration had worked with the district on past reforms. The foundation was instrumental in generating interest in and support for the project by school district officials.

Schlagle also benefited from the skills brought to the demonstration by several of the major actors in the project, contributing to the Project Transition team's capacity to change. The assistant principal, coach, and staff member who represented the learning resource partner were knowledgeable about the reform process, had considerable experience and expertise in instructional and classroom management techniques, and were respected by the Project Transition teachers. For example, the coach at Schlagle was valued by teachers for her skills as a mentor and facilitator as well as for her strong familiarity with techniques such as cooperative learning. Her counterpart at Pulaski, in contrast, came to the job with less directly applicable experience. Providing training for this role may be a necessary prerequisite to the intervention.

Another element in place at Schlagle was a consensus that a problem existed and that the intervention might solve it. Partly as a result of the longer planning period, Schlagle staff were engaged in extensive discussions about the project and came to believe that Project Transition was a vehicle to help solve the problems facing 9th graders. Thus, although the teachers' definition of the underlying problem was somewhat different from the assistant principal's (the teachers focused more on student behavioral problems than academic issues), both parties saw a reason to implement Project Transition.

- **The most difficult element of educational reform may be changes in teaching methods.**

The teacher teams and the coach position were designed to bring about increased professional development and to improve teaching methods. In fact, recent research in education suggests that changing what happens in the classroom may be the most important element of reform.

However, at least initially, at neither school did teachers use the daily team meetings to focus on teaching methods. At Pulaski, where change in teaching practices was not emphasized as a key element of Project Transition, it was not a natural outgrowth of Project Transition's implementation. Moreover, many teachers at Pulaski were resistant to activities designed to change teacher practice, such as classroom observation and feedback by the coach.

The experience at Schlagle illustrates that changing teaching methods is difficult even when it is emphasized as a key goal of the intervention. Teachers began to focus on this aspect of change only after prodding from the coach and assistant principal. The findings from both schools suggest that learning to teach in new ways is difficult. School reforms designed to alter teaching practice must be thoughtfully designed to provide teachers with the encouragement and support to do so.

Chapter 1

The Project Transition Demonstration: An Overview

I. Introduction

A high school diploma is a key to future earning power. It especially opens the door to postsecondary education. Yet many young people perform poorly in high school or drop out, with dropout rates being particularly high for students from families in poverty (National Center for Education Statistics, 1991). In part because "second chance" programs for high school dropouts have had results that are modest at best,[1] there is a pressing need for school reforms that prevent students from failing while they are still in high school.

For many students, the traditional structure and practices of large, comprehensive high schools appear to be major sources of low achievement and dropping out. Education research highlights the lack of fit between the structure and norms of many large, comprehensive high schools and the needs of their students. Research also strongly suggests that the first year of high school (typically grade 9) is a year in which many students, particularly students in large urban areas, start on the path toward low achievement and dropping out.

This report presents findings on the implementation and impacts of Project Transition, a research and demonstration program designed to test the effectiveness of a set of reforms focused on the first year of high school. Project Transition entails several changes in the environment of 9th-grade students and their teachers. These changes are expected to alter students' and teachers' attitudes and behavior in ways that help students make a successful transition from middle school to high school and ultimately improve students' attendance and performance. With the goal of improving student outcomes in the 9th grade, Project Transition seeks to start students off on the right track and aims to prevent subsequent poor performance and dropping out.

There are three core components of the Project Transition model:

1. Personalized, small-scale learning environments for students based on teacher-student teams that include four teachers of the core subjects (English, math, science, and social studies or geography) and approximately 120 9th-grade students who share many of the same classes.

2. Daily teacher team meetings for teachers to collaborate on professional development and ways of solving student problems.

3. A *coach,* or resource support teacher, and other supports to aid teachers' professional development and to improve instructional practice.

Project Transition was developed and evaluated by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), a private nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that designs and studies ini-

[1]See results in Cave et al. (1993) and Quint, Bos, and Polit (1997).

tiatives to improve the well-being and self-sufficiency of low-income populations, including at-risk youth. In developing the program model, MDRC held discussions with school administrators, education reform experts, key education constituency groups, policymakers, teachers, and students. MDRC introduced the reform to two schools (often called the demonstration sites) and provided them with ongoing technical assistance. In addition, MDRC designed and carried out the research agenda and provided feedback to the sites during the course of program operations. Project Transition was supported primarily by five funders — the Ford Foundation, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Helen Bader Foundation, Joyce Foundation, Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR, supported by the U.S. Department of Education) — and the two participating school districts.

The evaluation was intended to answer the following questions:

- How successful were the two sites in implementing the program model and its various components?
- What factors explain the sites' implementation experiences?
- What were the effects of Project Transition on teachers' attitudes and on their behavior inside and outside the classroom?
- How did the intervention affect students' feelings of relatedness to classmates, support from teachers, and engagement in school?
- What were the impacts of Project Transition on students' attendance and academic achievement?

The evaluation includes a study of the program's implementation at the two demonstration sites and an analysis of its impacts. The impacts are estimated using a *cohort comparison design*. The design calls for the comparison of the outcomes for a cohort of students who were 9th graders in the year preceding the implementation of Project Transition (the control or comparison group) with the outcomes for the students who were 9th graders while Project Transition was implemented (the program groups). Outcome information for the 9th-grade year was collected from two sources. School administrative records provided information on outcomes such as grade point average (GPA) and attendance. Student surveys measured outcomes such as student perceptions of their relationships with classmates and their engagement in school.

The demonstration began at Pulaski High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with a planning phase during the 1994-95 school year. Project Transition was implemented at Pulaski and studied by MDRC during 1995-96 and 1996-97. Activities at Schlagle High School in Kansas City, Kansas, started a year later than at Pulaski, with Schlagle's planning phase occurring during the 1995-96 school year. Implementation and effects of Project Transition were studied by MDRC at Schlagle for a single school year in 1996-97.[2]

[2]Some elements of the Project Transition model continued at each school after MDRC concluded its study (see Chapters 2 and 3).

This chapter sets the stage for the rest of the report. The following section explains the rationale for Project Transition's focus on the 9th grade, reviews the relevant literature relating to the demonstration's components, and discusses a related reform that Project Transition sought to expand and test rigorously. Section III describes the Project Transition components in greater detail. This chapter concludes with an overview of the remainder of the report.

II. The Rationale for the Project Transition Demonstration and a Review of the Literature

A. Ninth Grade as a Problematic Transition Point

Project Transition's focus on the first year of high school is consistent with the large body of research showing that significant transition experiences (such as the first year of retirement, the first months in a new job, the first year of a marriage, and the birth of a child) can be occasions of stress, illness, family disruption and divorce, job failure, and other major problems (literature reviewed by Wapner, 1981).

Research shows that the transition from middle school to high school can be a difficult adjustment for students, marked by a decline in attendance and achievement even for students who have previously been doing well in school. Felner, Primavera, and Cauce (1981) found that transitions from middle school to high school are experienced by students as stressful and that experiencing the transition as stressful is normal for students given the number of changes to which students must adapt as they move from one environment to another. Felner and his colleagues examined the GPAs (for core courses), attendance records, and total number of school transfers of 250 randomly selected students who had completed the 9th grade in three urban high schools serving predominantly low-income families. They found that while school transfers in prior years had no significant impact on grades or attendance, the transition occurring between middle school and high school had a significant negative effect on students' academic performance and attendance. Specifically, they found that in the first year of high school, 45 percent of the students were absent more than 20 days, while in the year before high school only 23 percent had that level of absenteeism. In addition, students' grade point averages fell by more than one-half a letter grade in the first year of high school; the percentage of students achieving lower than a C average was 40 percent in the first year of high school compared with 22 percent in the year before high school. These declines were concentrated among African American students and students with a history of repeated school transfers. Felner et al. (1993) also concluded that while the transition from middle school to high school can be a stressful time for all groups of students, students with fewer resources due to family and community circumstances have less to rely on during times of stress and become more vulnerable to negative educational outcomes than students with access to greater resources.

Melissa Roderick (1990) also documented troubling outcomes for first-year high school students. She found that students' absences during the first year of high school were strongly related to subsequent dropping out, low achievement, and other problems. In a subsequent study, Roderick (1993) followed 757 7th-grade students longitudinally. She found that the academic performance and attendance of students who eventually became high school dropouts decreased

dramatically after each transition (i.e., from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school). Roderick concluded that dropping out is not based on some individualized phenomenon but on something within the environment that causes youth to become disengaged from school after experiencing a transition to a new school.

Seidman et al. (1996) also studied transitions and found that among poor urban youth there was a decline in GPAs during the first year of high school. Further analysis of the youths' perceptions of both school and peer microsystems revealed that they felt a significant loss of support from educational staff while experiencing significant increases in academic hassles defined as negative transactions with teachers or other adults regarding the students' academic activities throughout the transition year.[3] Seidman and his colleagues concluded that these changes in student perceptions stem from existing organizational arrangements within schools and not from changes within the students themselves, since other aspects of their self-systems remained relatively stable over time; they therefore recommended that more attention be paid to restructuring high schools in order to make them more engaging (or "user friendly") for students.

B. Large High Schools as Troubled Environments for Learning and Teaching

As the work of several researchers cited earlier indicates, the transition from middle school to high school is usually accompanied by a dramatic change in environment. From the perspective of first-year students, the high school is full of hundreds of strangers, most of them older, more confident, and more aggressive than first-year students. Older students often harass younger students; sexual harassment of both girls and boys is commonplace (AAUW Educational Foundation, 1993). Students may have well-founded fears of violence and crime in school and while traveling between home and school (Portner, 1996).

The structure of the typical high school — especially that of large, comprehensive high schools in urban centers — also makes for conditions that inhibit students' intellectual and social growth. The ability of students to become members of a community is increasingly viewed as important to their psychological health and social development, especially during the adolescent years, when students are involved in the process of creating their own identities (Erikson, 1968). But high school is typically a far more impersonal place than middle school or elementary school, one in which students are much less likely to experience a sense of community.

Research by Eccles et al. (1993) suggests that a large majority of American schools have not been able to meet the developmental needs of adolescents due to a poor fit between the school environment and the students' social and emotional needs. First, the structure of high school makes it very difficult for teachers and students to connect with each other. Because students have a different teacher for each class, and because each teacher may have 150 or more students, there are few opportunities and little time during the school day for teachers to develop close relationships with their students. Such relationships are often aloof and detached, and students are thereby deprived of the chance to receive adult support. Eccles and colleagues found

[3]A Daily Hassles Scale is cited in Seidman et al. (1994) and is described as having two subscales, one for peers and one for schools. Each subscale consists of four events which students rate on a 4-point scale ranging from "not at all a hassle" to "a very big hassle."

that educational environments in middle school and high school do not foster positive student-teacher relationships because of departmentalized structures that decrease the quality of student-teacher contacts over time.

This process occurs precisely when students are in need of supportive mentoring from teachers who are able to foster their attachment to their work. One study by Midgley, Feldlaufer, and Eccles (1989) demonstrated that students show a decrease in the value they attach to math as they make the transition from elementary school to middle school if they move from an environment where teachers were more supportive to an environment where math teachers are less supportive than teachers in their previous school. Conversely, students who move from an environment where teachers are less supportive to an environment where teachers are more supportive show significant increases in the value they attach to math. These finding may suggest that supportive relationships with teachers are important pathways that enable students to value their academic experiences.

Not only do many students feel alienated from their teachers, but they also may feel alienated from their fellow classmates. Because students change class every hour and may have different classmates in every class, they may have little time or opportunity to get to know their classmates well, and their school-based friendships may be superficial or nonexistent. Many students feel anonymous and isolated because they know and are known by only a small proportion of their classmates, reducing the support they receive from peers (Felner, Primavera, and Cauce, 1981).

Lack of support from teachers or peers may contribute to students' intellectual and emotional withdrawal from school (and sometimes physical withdrawal as well, as evidenced by high rates of absenteeism). Researchers engaged in intensive study of conditions at large high schools found that alienation and disengagement from the school environment were rampant (Fine, 1991; Newmann, 1981).

If high school students often feel isolated, so do their teachers — although such isolation may be characteristic of the teaching profession in general rather than of high school teachers in particular. Teachers are often literally shut off from each other behind the closed doors of their classrooms and have few opportunities for discussions with their colleagues about classroom instruction, students, and creative problem solving (Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989). This isolation also contributes to a climate of defensiveness and distrust among teachers (Little, 1982).[4]

[4]Teachers in low-income communities face a range of additional concerns. One is potential violence erupting among their students, who are often experiencing hardships related to poverty and basic issues of survival (Kopka, 1997). In addition, urban schools in low-income areas often receive less public funding than suburban schools, contributing to conditions of scarcity and physical decay within these schools (Louis and Miles, 1989; McLaughlin, 1992; Rosenholtz, 1989). Teachers often perceive school administrators in poor districts as cutting corners at the expense of both teachers and students and, consequently, as leaving the teachers unsupported (McLaughlin, 1992). For these reasons, teacher burnout is a critical problem in low-income urban schools, leading to much higher rates of turnover and a less stable and experienced staff than in wealthier school districts (Farber, 1991).

C. Conditions That Promote Effective Learning and Teaching

A substantial body of research shows that small high schools have much better educational outcomes than large high schools, especially in urban areas (Fowler and Walberg, 1991; Goodlad, 1984; Lindsay, 1982; Oxley, 1989; Pittman and Haughwout, 1987). Evidence indicates that small schools are more successful because they support the development of the sense of community that is likely to be missing in larger school settings (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988). Using data from the High School and Beyond study, Bryk and Driscoll (1988) found that schools with strong, positive communities were characterized by:

> . . . a system of shared values among the members of the organization, reflected primarily in beliefs about the purposes of the institution, about what students should learn, about how adults and students should behave, and about what kinds of people students are capable of becoming; a common agenda of activities designed to foster meaningful social interactions among school members and link them to school traditions; a distinctive patter of social relations, embodying an ethos of caring that is visibly manifest in collegial relations among the adults of the institution and in an extended teacher role. (p. 1)

The researchers found that schools with these "communitarian" characteristics were more effective at decreasing students' negative behaviors (such as cutting classes, being disorderly, being truant, and dropping out) than schools lacking these characteristics.

While the communal characteristics of a school can create a climate that is more conducive to learning, actual learning may not take place unless students also become engaged with academic activities within their classrooms.[5] Based on empirical as well as observational data, Newmann, Wehlage, and Lanborn (1992) suggest that along with the extent to which students experience membership in the school, two other factors facilitate students' motivation to become engaged in learning: students' underlying need for competence and the authenticity of the work they are asked to complete. The authors assert that teachers can create conditions that foster student membership and attachment to work by raising their expectations of students' ability to meet increased challenges. They argue that at a deeper level, raising expectations and challenges conveys to students that teachers have clear goals and are supportive and caring about students' lives. At the same time, higher expectations and challenges also promote greater student ownership of the work, because students must expend more effort and interest to complete the assigned tasks.

All this suggests that teachers who are supportive and whose assignments are interesting and challenging are essential to fostering students' engagement in learning. (See Skinner and Belmont, 1993.) It is not surprising, therefore, that the development among teachers of a sense of collective responsibility for student learning and achievement is a central theme of the school

[5]Newmann, Wehlage, and Lanborn (1992) view engagement as a psychological investment concurrent with efforts to master an experience, defining it succinctly as "an inner quality of concentration and effort to learn" (p. 13). They maintain, further, that this type of engagement "calls special attention to the social contexts that help activate underlying motivation" or "to conditions that may generate new motivation" (p. 13).

restructuring movement. The question then arises, What conditions promote this sense of collective responsibility?

Several respected educational researchers argue that teachers are able to assume collective responsibility for student learning only when they themselves can develop supportive relationships with their colleagues to improve their practice as educators (Little and McLaughlin, 1993; Newmann and Wehlage, 1995). Observations of teacher teams in middle schools reveal that collegiality and trust are important factors in teachers' willingness to expand their own learning and to experiment with new forms of pedagogy and curriculum (Guiton et al., 1995). The development of a sense of community among teachers can increase their openness to questioning old beliefs and behaviors and to supporting each other in adopting new beliefs and behaviors.

Supportive relationships among teachers are fostered by opportunities to collaborate with each other (Little, 1982, 1990; Louis, 1992). The use of interdisciplinary teacher teaming is one way that teachers can engage in collaborative and supportive activities with each other in order to improve practice and to create school environments that are more supportive of students (Louis, Marks, and Kruse, 1996).[6]

The literature suggests, however, that collaboration among teachers, while promising, is not easy to implement and does not necessarily produce the desired results in and of itself. In the normal course of business, teachers often have little time to engage with other teachers on a regular basis in order to build effective collaborations and support networks (Louis, 1992; Louis and King, 1993). MacIver (1990) reported that school administrators or districts frequently do not give teachers adequate common planning time and that when they do, individual teachers often do not work well together or use the time for their own individual work tasks. (In one study, this problem was remedied by creating teams with formal leaders who where able to help direct the activities of team members (see MacIver and Epstein, 1991). Furthermore, collegiality and trust take time to develop (Guiton et al., 1995). The literature also suggests that it may be important to have individuals present who are in a position to help teachers examine their assumptions and to guide their practices. Lipman (1997) noted that even within teams, teachers may categorize certain students on the basis of class, income, race, language, or past academic performance unless they are challenged to think beyond old conceptualizations and solutions. Furthermore, Firestone (1993) warned educators that collaboratives and structures such as teacher teams do not necessarily result in the professionalization of teaching and maintained that teachers must be guided to develop student-centered instructional techniques in order to improve classroom practice in fundamental ways that affect student achievement.

D. An Early Prototype of Project Transition

Project Transition is grounded not only in the literature on effective teaching and learning communities but also on an earlier effort to create an intervention that would counteract the

[6]By 1990, teacher teaming was practiced in about 40 percent of middle schools, because it was viewed as a more effective way of engaging early adolescents, who require more supportive relationships with teachers than they were receiving in traditional junior high schools (MacIver, 1990).

negative effects of transitions to high school. The School Transitional Environment Program (STEP) was designed by Felner and his colleagues on the basis of their previous research highlighting students' special vulnerability during the critical period of their transition to high school. STEP consisted of three primary reform components: (1) creating a stable cluster of 60 to 100 9th-grade students who took their four primary academic subjects with the same group of four teachers; (2) having each cluster of students take their primary classes in close physical proximity to each other; and (3) assigning a STEP teacher as homeroom teacher, with roles that included guidance and administrative counseling for STEP students. It was hypothesized that these changes during the transition year would facilitate students' sense of belonging, peer support, and adult support and would create a stable environment for 9th graders.

Felner and his colleagues conducted a number of studies of STEP. They found (Felner, Ginter, and Primavera, 1982) that the 59 STEP students perceived their school environments as much more supportive than did the 113 control students. Furthermore, STEP-program participants achieved higher grades (cumulative GPAs of 2.78 versus 2.29 for the control group) and better attendance (17 days of absence versus 25) and experienced better self-concepts than a control group.

In a long-term follow-up study, Felner et al. (1993) learned that starting with the end of the 10th-grade year, significantly fewer of the students in the program group than in the control group dropped out of school by the end of each successive school year, even though the intervention took place only in the first year.[7]

There were also significant positive effects on school performance and attendance patterns. In the 9th and 10th grades, program-group students had significantly higher GPAs in their core courses than did control students (.50 higher in 9th grade and .16 higher in 10th grade). A significant difference did not hold up through 11th and 12th grades, due to the differential dropout rates of the two groups.[8] In measuring absences, program-group students had significantly fewer absences than control-group students throughout high school. For 9th through 11th grades, control-group students were absent approximately nine more times than students in the program group. This difference decreased to approximately five absences in the 12th grade.

These findings demonstrate that the effects of the intervention had more than short-term consequences for student performance and that creating a successful transition to high school could provide an important opportunity to increase students' educational success. Finally, Felner et al. (1993) found that the STEP program provided additional preventative supports that enabled students with fewer resources or with high-risk circumstances to maintain stable academic achievement levels and self-concepts, while control groups suffered from lower academic achievement and self-concepts.

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[7]At the end of 10th grade, 11.4 percent of the program group had dropped out of school compared with 18.5 percent of the control group. The differences were also significant at the end of the 11th (19.1 percent in program group, 31.6 percent in control group) and 12th grades (24.3 percent, 42.7 percent) but not at the end of 9th grade (7.3 percent versus 10.7 percent).

[8]While not significant, students in the control group actually had higher GPAs in their core classes for 11th grade than program-group students.

In part, Project Transition was developed as a way to replicate certain features of the STEP program on a wider scale and to subject them to further evaluation. The STEP program was an attractive model to investigate further because the effects appeared to be both substantial and long term. In addition, the changes contained in the intervention were largely structural and appeared relatively straightforward to implement, making the approach highly replicable and policy relevant. In creating the model for Project Transition, MDRC incorporated the cluster structure of the STEP program (and common to many school-within-a-school interventions) and also sought to foster personal teacher-student relationships. In addition, while STEP sought to create a more supportive environment for students, Project Transition also included the resources intended to create a more supportive environment for teachers' growth and staff development.

The next session discusses the particular components of the Project Transition model.

III. The Project Transition Model

The Project Transition model was especially designed to benefit students in large urban high schools that draw from several feeder schools and have a history of high dropout rates and weak student performance. Within these settings, it was designed to be implemented for all students in their first year of high school,[9] except those in special programs with schedules that precluded their participation.

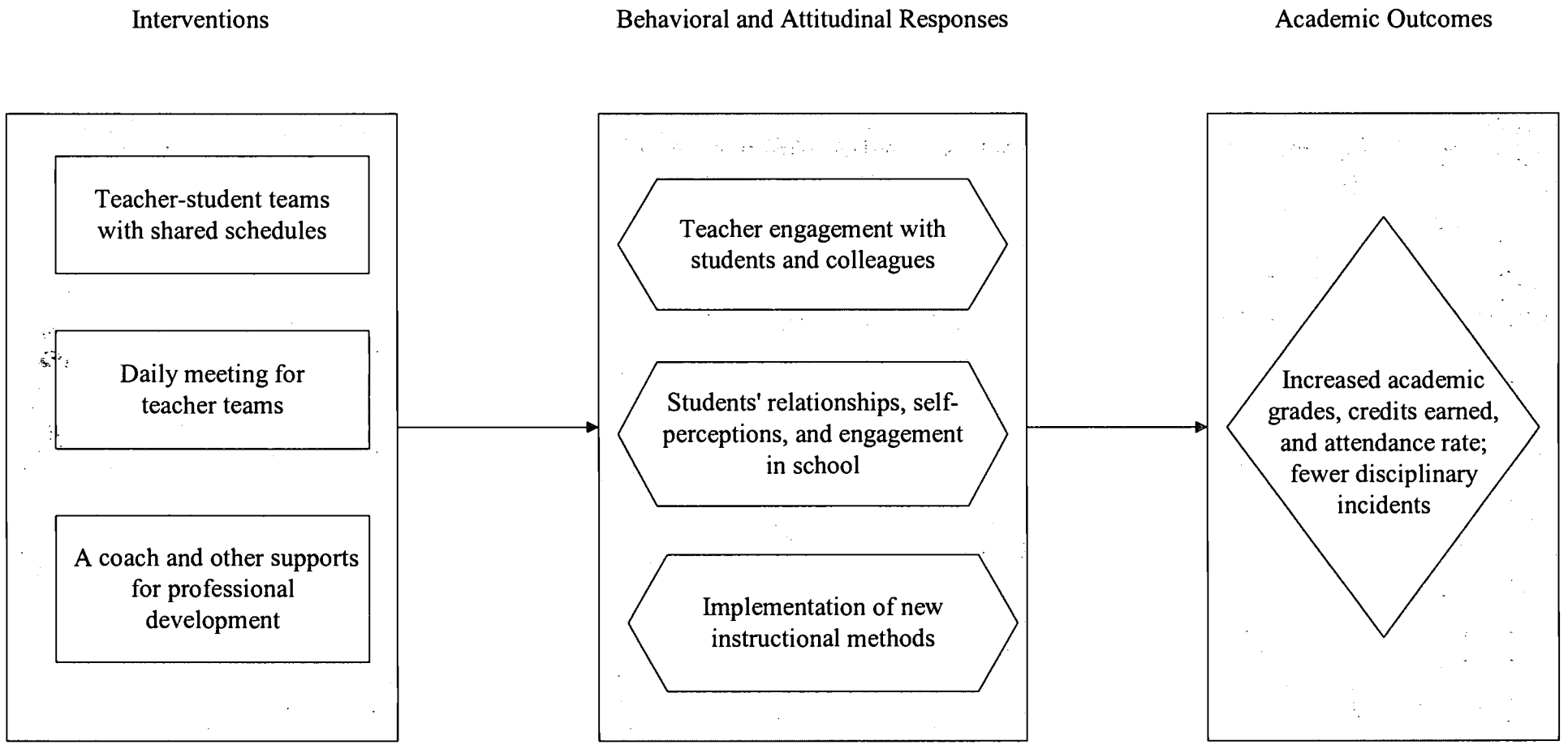
Project Transition consisted of three principal reform elements to change the structure of the 9th grade for both students and teachers.[10] As depicted in Figure 1.1, these reform elements (or interventions) were intended to lead to behavioral and attitudinal responses among teachers and students. In turn, these responses were hypothesized to affect students' educational outcomes such as grades and credits earned, attendance, and disciplinary incidents. As explained in the following sections, the components of Project Transition provided opportunities and resources for professional development, which came to be specifically viewed as the improvement of teacher practice. However, Project Transition did not prescribe specific instructional methods. Rather, it was expected that teachers, with the involvement of the coach, would identify and pur-

[9]In some instances, students who were repeating 9th grade were included in Project Transition classes. However, these students are not part of the study's sample. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of the Project Transition sample.

[10]Sites were encouraged to enhance the main elements to fit the particular context of their school. Ways in which the program model were adapted and enhanced by Pulaski High School and Schlagle High School are discussed in the subsequent implementation chapters.

The program model originally specified a fourth explicit component — the use of *action plans*. Action plans were envisioned as systematic plans of action for classroom-based methods (rather than traditional referrals outside the classroom) to respond to students who fall behind in their studies. Specific examples of activities resulting from action plans included tutoring by peers, extra instructional time, and student-teacher parent contracts. In the implementation of Project Transition, MDRC staff were conflicted over how prescriptive to be in devising action plans for the teachers. The result was a deemphasis on action plans as an explicit fourth component. Rather, the activities (i.e., extra instructional time) that would have resulted from explicit action plans were viewed as part of the student problem-solving element of the daily team meetings. Instead of uniform action plans for the entire project, strategies to help low-achieving students varied by site and by team.

Figure 1.1
Project Transition and Its Intended Effects



sue methods of their own choosing. Further, while Project Transition restructured the 9th-grade environment to provide opportunities for the fostering of more personal teacher-student relationships, the project did not prescribe methods, such as specific teacher advisory duties, to enhance teacher-student relationships or support students.

A. Teacher-Student Teams and Shared Scheduling

The Project Transition model called for the reorganization of 9th-grade class schedules to create small teacher-student teams. Teachers and students were to be clustered into teams consisting of four teachers, each representing one of four core academic subjects (Math, English, Science, and History or Geography), and the number of students typically found in four 9th-grade classes (approximately 120). This system allowed each of the four teachers in a team to share the same students. In addition to the creation of teacher-student teams, student schedules within each team were to be structured so that each student would have a group of a dozen or so peers who shared the same schedule for the four core classes. This arrangement is referred to as shared scheduling.[11]

Teacher-student teams are a break from the traditional organization of the high school, which, as indicated previously, provides little interpersonal support for entering students. For students, teaming combined with shared scheduling aimed to create small stable groups of classmates who knew their classmates and their teachers well and who took many of their academic classes together. For teachers, teaming sought to create small teacher clusters whose members worked with the same students and came to know them well. The family-like teams in a school-within-a-school atmosphere sought to increase substantially the interaction of students with their teachers and their classmates. In fostering closer, more supportive relationships between students and their teachers, teaming and shared scheduling were expected to increase student engagement in school.

B. Daily Teacher Team Meetings

Project Transition also attempted to create a structure that was supportive to teachers, enabling them to develop teacher communities to promote student learning and engagement. The program model called for each Project Transition teacher to have a daily class period during the school day designated for a team meeting, thereby ensuring that teachers would have the time to engage in shared planning, problem solving, and professional development. For the demonstration, this period, also known as the *common planning period,* was created by reducing the teaching load of Project Transition teachers by one class period;[12] the participating school districts provided funding to support this reduction. In some instances, team meetings for each team of teachers were scheduled to occur during the same class period to facilitate collaboration across

[11]Other reform efforts seeking to create small instructional units within high schools have sometimes led to increases in the use of tracking according to academic ability, which often results in lowered expectations and watered-down instruction for low-achieving students (Oxley, 1994). In designing Project Transition, MDRC sought to ensure that the creation of student-teacher teams would not result in increased tracking of students.

[12]It was expected that participating in Project Transition would result in extra work, thereby justifying a one-course reduction in teaching load. Furthermore, the team common planning period did not replace teachers' regular preparation period.

teams (i.e., meetings of all Project Transition teachers or all Project Transition math teachers) and provide an even wider pool of resources on which to draw.[13]

As envisioned by the program planners, the daily team meetings had two principal objectives. The first was to provide a forum in which teachers, who worked with the same students and came to know them well, worked together to identify and resolve students' problems before these became overwhelming.

Second, the team meetings were intended to create an environment in which teachers were active participants in their own professional development to improve instructional methods. In this respect, the daily team meetings are different from the traditional mode of professional development, which often consists of lectures and workshops transmitting pre-packaged prescriptive methods to teachers. Teacher teams that meet daily would allow teachers to conduct their own professional development activities that responded to teachers' classroom problems, were adapted to particular issues in their student teams, and were directly relevant to the needs that teachers perceived for improvement in their instruction. Through the daily meetings, too, teachers would be in a position to reinforce, review, and revise their efforts as part of an ongoing process.

C. The Coach and Other Supports

The Project Transition coach is a full-time position for an experienced person who serves as a nonsupervisory peer to the Project Transition teachers, primarily by supporting their professional development. For the demonstration, MDRC provided the funding for the salary and fringe benefits for this position for two school years in each site.[14]

The coach position was unusual in that it was meant to provide an intensive, one-on-one source of assistance and stimulation that is typically unavailable to teachers. In the program model, it was hypothesized that the coach would facilitate teacher collaboration by modeling encouragement, feedback, and constructive criticism to the teacher teams and by helping the teachers reflect on their current practice, improve their instructional methods, and identify effective strategies for engaging students in coursework and supporting students who fall behind.

Specific duties of the coach were expected to vary to reflect the needs of the teachers and included facilitation of teacher team meetings;[15] facilitation of teachers observing one another's classrooms (*cross-visiting*); observation of classes in a nonsupervisory support role including demonstration of lessons; organization of professional development opportunities for teachers; and facilitation of lesson sharing among teachers. In addition, schools may have had specific in-

[13]In some instances, it was not possible or desirable to schedule each of the team meetings to occur during the same class period, so teachers scheduled regular meeting time outside the school day for all the teachers to meet together. Teachers also used professional development money (described in the next section) to fund time for all the Project Transition teachers to meet for extended lengths of time (e.g., staff retreats).

[14]Although the demonstration was originally designed to be studied for one year in each site, funding for the coach position was provided for two years. In this way, districts did not have to decide whether to assume the funding of the position before MDRC released the results of the evaluation of Project Transition.

[15]The ability of the coach to attend and facilitate all team meetings was an advantage to scheduling each team's meeting during a different class period.

structional or curricular foci that were stressed in their school or district and were appropriate for the coach to help develop further among the teachers (e.g., cooperative learning, career exploration).

While the coach was the primary support, other supports provided in the model include the learning resource partner, summer institutes, and supplementary financial resources for use by the teacher teams. The learning resource partner was a local institution or agency either within or outside the school district that supported Project Transition by helping the coach and providing ongoing technical assistance and professional development for the teachers.

The summer institute, another support provided to the teachers, was intended to consist of several intensive days of professional development and planning for Project Transition at the close of or before the start of the school year. The institute was to provide teacher teams an extended block of time in which to collaborate. The learning resource partner assisted in the development of components of the summer institute and also facilitated some of the activities.

In recognition of the fact that teachers in Project Transition needed additional resources to engage in activities for Project Transition (i.e., materials such as journal subscriptions, special workshops), additional funds outside the normal school budget were made available for use by the Project Transition teachers.[16] Use of these funds was at the discretion of the Project Transition teachers with the stipulation that they were for furthering the goals of the project. In addition, a sum of $500 per team per year was allocated for use directly with students (e.g., for field trip funds, prizes, etc.).[17]

D. MDRC's Approach to Implementation

Since Project Transition was developed by MDRC, an entity outside the schools adopting the model, it is important to consider how MDRC introduced the model to the schools. This is discussed in subsequent chapters. It is also important to examine MDRC staff views on the model, which may have affected the way in which Project Transition was introduced to the schools.

In particular, MDRC staff disagreed about the primacy of the interventions in the model. While no one element necessarily needed to be stressed above others, some staff felt it was important to stress the building of a personal environment for students, while other staff thought that creating a personal environment was not as necessary as modifying instructional practice through professional development. The lack of agreement on the primary focus, as well as on the degree of directiveness, created complications in the implementation of the project, which is discussed later in this report.

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[16]Teachers at Pulaski High School received $15,000 for the two years of implementation (originally intended to be one year). Teachers at Schlagle High School received $12,000 (most of which was spent in the first year of implementation, but remaining funds were used the next year).

[17]For the demonstration, MDRC provided the funding for the activities of the learning resource partner and additional funding for teacher professional development and the teams. Funding for the initial summer institute at each site was provided by MDRC. Other institutes, during the evaluation period, were funded from each site's discretionary professional development funds.

E. The Demonstration Sites

Both Pulaski and Schlagle were large, comprehensive high schools in urban school districts. The schools were composed of 9th through 12th grades and had high percentages of students of color and students receiving free or subsidized lunch (see Table 1). The two sites also had characteristics — such as a high percentage of students with low grade point averages, a high percentage of dropouts, and a decline in student grade point averages and attendance from 8th to 9th grade — that Project Transition was intended to influence, and thus were considered viable sites for the demonstration. In addition, Pulaski had particularly high absence rates.

Because of a student choice program, students came to Pulaski from many different middle schools. During the demonstration period, students from approximately 20 (middle or K-8) schools in the district attended Pulaski, with no more than 10 percent of the 9th-grade class coming from the same school. Thus, Pulaski students made the transition from their middle school knowing relatively few of their classmates. In contrast, approximately 70 percent of Schlagle students came from four middle schools in the district (with about half of the students arriving from one of two schools) and were thus likely to have entered Schlagle knowing many of their classmates.

The schools' teaching staffs also had the potential to be affected by Project Transition. Prior to the demonstration at both sites, team structures did not exist, so teachers were not especially likely to teach the same students as their colleagues. In addition, there was little evidence of teacher collaboration.

IV. Outline of the Report

This report covers the implementation and impacts of Project Transition in both the demonstration sites. The rest of this report is divided into six chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 examine the implementation of the model at Pulaski and Schlagle, respectively. Chapter 4 discusses teachers' responses to the intervention by examining responses of teachers at Pulaski and Schlagle. Chapter 5 focuses on the study methodology and data sources. Impacts of the demonstration in both sites are discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 concludes the report with a discussion of the conditions for successful implementation of the model and the relationship between implementation and impacts.

Chapter 2

Implementing the Project in Milwaukee

I. Introduction

The implementation of the Project Transition model at Pulaski High School in Milwaukee presents a mixed picture. The lessons learned from the Milwaukee experience about what to do — and what not to do — served to inform and improve the implementation of the program in Kansas City, Kansas.

Originally planned as a one-year research and demonstration project for the 1995-96 academic year, Pulaski staff, the Milwaukee Public Schools, the project's funders, and MDRC agreed to extend the demonstration for a second year to allow for more complete implementation and a more adequate test of the intervention. Over the two-year period, the principal elements of the program model — small groups of students sharing their core-subject classes, daily teacher team meetings, a resource support teacher, and professional development activities for staff — were all eventually put in place, although they coexisted simultaneously for only one of the four semesters.

The teacher team meetings were easily the best-received aspect of the project. Teachers prized their team meetings and saw them as an important vehicle for reducing their feelings of isolation, for sharing information about students, and for advancing integrated instruction across the different academic disciplines. These meetings themselves were revolutionary in a traditional high school where teachers were more used to working independently than to sharing ideas with other teachers. Many teachers also took advantage of the professional development opportunities afforded to them. Other components of the program model won a less enthusiastic reception. Shared scheduling drew initial resistance, and after it was implemented, administrators and teachers remained unconvinced of its value. Furthermore, the resource support teacher was widely perceived as less effective than he might have been. (From the outset, Milwaukee personnel decided to avoid calling this person a "coach" because of the perceived hierarchical connotations of the term.) And the contribution of the learning resource partner, another potential avenue for professional development, was slight.

Overall, then, implementation of the structural elements of the program model was less robust than it might have been. And while some Project Transition teachers altered and expanded their instructional practices, especially in response to the introduction of more integrated curriculum units, the project does not appear to have been as much of a catalyst for instructional change as some of the parties to the demonstration had hoped.

Despite these difficulties, by the end of the demonstration period, Pulaski's principal felt certain that Project Transition was making a difference in helping the school move toward a more personalized environment for both teachers and students as well as toward more hands-on learning. After the demonstration ended, the principal decided to maintain the practices of assigning 9th graders to teams (also known as *families* or *clusters*), each headed by a group of core-

subject teachers, and giving these teachers a period in which to meet each day. He committed the school's resources to defraying the cost of two extra teachers, thereby enabling Project Transition teachers to reduce the number of classes they taught each day from five to four.

This chapter examines the progress of program implementation at Pulaski and the problems that were encountered. The information it contains is based principally on data collected by MDRC staff members in the course of site visits to the school over the two years of the demonstration, as well as the predemonstration summer institute. During the school visits, the staff members conducted structured and informal individual interviews with the Pulaski principal, assistant principal, resource support teacher, and all Project Transition teachers, as well as group interviews with guidance counselors and nonproject teachers. They also observed the classrooms of all Project Transition teachers at least once, sat in on several meetings of each small-group teacher team, and attended full-group teacher team meetings when possible. Although the teachers were the main emphasis of the qualitative research efforts, the researchers also conducted focus groups with students from each of the teams. Program-related documents and a survey administered to the teachers were other important sources of information.

Following this introductory section, the chapter describes the school environment: the physical plant and its environment, the students it serves, the way in which teachers explain students' performance, and classroom practices. Part III then considers the program planning period. Part IV turns to the demonstration period itself, starting with an overview and then discussing the key elements of the model. Here, the focus is on how these program elements helped shape project teachers' relationships with students and with each other, as well as their attitudes toward their work. Part V describes a range of efforts to instill feelings of community and support among students and how students responded to these efforts. The chapter concludes with some brief reflections on what Project Transition has and has not meant at Pulaski High School.

II. The School and Its Students

A. The Building and Its Environment

The imposing yellow-brick facade of Pulaski High School extends several hundred feet along Oklahoma Avenue, a major thoroughfare in the southern part of Milwaukee. The building is essentially a long rectangle; administrative offices and classrooms are located on the ground floor, and other classrooms and offices line the corridors of the remaining two stories and the basement. Handsome art deco stonework and metal grille details reflect the building's 1939 completion date, as do the wood floors and paneling in many classrooms and offices. The halls are decorated with trophy cases, student artwork, posters announcing school events, and the like. A parking lot and athletic fields abut the school to the east; an avenue lined by commercial establishments and a large hospital runs past the building on the west. The school is located in a white working-class neighborhood of modest, pleasant homes set on small lots along tree-lined streets. The school and its surroundings convey an impression of solidity and careful upkeep.

Among Milwaukee's high schools, Pulaski has long been known as the best place to go for training in the automotive trades; its School-to-Work Integrated Studies (SWIS) program,

which is focused on automotive technology, attracts a substantial number of minority students. The school houses approximately 175 staff members (including about 105 teachers and counselors) and has an enrollment of some 1,750 students. In October 1996 (at the end of the first marking period of the 1996-97 academic year), its student body included 704 freshmen, 471 sophomores, 305 juniors, and 258 seniors. Of the 9th graders, about 180 were repeating the grade, and 150 were enrolled in SWIS. The remaining 375 or so 9th graders were members of the Project Transition teams.

The size of the building and of the student body can make Pulaski a difficult environment to negotiate, especially for freshmen. Focus groups conducted with 9th graders indicate that it took most students anywhere from a week to a month to get used to the layout of the school; as one student put it, "You're stupid until you go here for a while. You gotta find where you're going. It's a big building." A further complicating factor is that because of busing (discussed further on), Pulaski draws students from many areas of the city and from about 20 middle schools and schools enrolling kindergartners through 8th graders. This means that many freshmen arrive at Pulaski not knowing many other students. Thus, the focus-group respondents (numbering about 40) were evenly divided between those who knew 11 or more Pulaski students when they first came to the school and those who knew 10 or fewer.

The school day, which begins at 7:30 A.M. and ends at 2:40 P.M., is divided into a 22-minute homeroom period and eight class periods, called *hours*, which are generally 49 minutes long; in addition, students have a 30-minute lunch break. During the five-minute passing period between classes, the halls teem with activity as students make their way from one class to the next — sometimes a considerable distance, given the sprawling physical plant. Once the buzzer that signals the start of the next class period sounds, however, the hallways are largely empty except for the handful of teachers and others on hall duty, and quiet prevails. Indeed, as one walks through the corridors, one frequently hears the sonorous tones of an instructional film or video, but little noise — whether of chatter or laughter or rowdiness — emerges from behind the closed classroom doors. Teachers say that Pulaski's principal, who has been at the school since September 1990, places a high priority on keeping order and discipline, and while there are sometimes fights, there is little crime or serious violence.

B. The Student Body

Ethnicity. Although the school is located in a white residential area, the student body at Pulaski is highly diverse ethnically and is mostly nonwhite. However, the ethnic composition of the 9th-grade class changed considerably over the two-year demonstration period. At the beginning of the 1995-96 school year, 48 percent of students in the entering 9th-grade class were African American, 30 percent white, 15 percent Hispanic, and 7 percent Asian and Native American. The next school year, the proportion of African American 9th graders fell sharply to 33 percent, while the proportion of Hispanics rose to 28 percent and the proportion of whites also increased slightly to 32 percent.[1]

[1]These percentages reflect a census of students taken on the third Friday in September of each school year.

The school's ethnic makeup and the changes in it reflect two realities. The first is the fact that although whites comprise the majority of Milwaukee's population, 60 percent of all students in the city's public schools are black. The second is Milwaukee Public Schools' 20-year effort, spurred by a 1976 court order, to increase racial integration.

Busing of students away from highly segregated neighborhood schools to more heterogeneous schools in other parts of the city has been one modality for achieving greater ethnic balance. At the beginning and end of the school day, yellow school buses line Oklahoma Avenue to transport Pulaski students back to their home neighborhoods. Policies that give parents and students a considerable degree of choice in the schools students attend are another key measure for achieving integration.[2] At the point of transition from middle school to high school (as at other key transition points), parents and children may apply for available spaces in up to three schools of their choice, and an effort is made to assign each student to one of her three top choices. In 1995-96, four high schools and the career specialty programs at all Milwaukee high schools (including the automotive technology program at Pulaski) were open to students from across the city. The remaining 11 high schools were open to students residing in the schools' designated attendance areas, and six of these, including Pulaski, were open as well to African American but not to white students residing outside the attendance area. (Three traditionally black high schools were also open to nonblack students from outside the attendance areas.)

In 1996-97, in contrast, Pulaski was opened to students from all over the city. It is noteworthy that the proportion of white and Hispanic 9th graders admitted to Pulaski as their first-choice school increased between the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years, from 45 percent to 60 percent. This may have been in part because during 1996-97 another high school, which had served largely Hispanic students, was being "reconstituted" (Milwaukee Public School parlance for a series of measures including staff reassignment intended to improve schools with consistently poor outcomes). Many students who otherwise would have attended that school may have elected to begin high school in Pulaski's less troubled environment. Pulaski's principal also speculated that Project Transition itself may have been a "selling point," as parents and students came to hear about the new program.

In both academic years, African American students at Pulaski who were enrolled in the general program rather than a vocational one were considerably less likely than students of other ethnic backgrounds to have selected Pulaski as one of their three preferred schools.[3] Sheer force of numbers may partially account for the fact that some black students at Pulaski did not want to

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[2]The Milwaukee School Board's policy states in part, "Any student desiring to attend a racially balanced school [defined as a school whose student population is between 30 and 70 percent African American] shall have the right to do so." Hispanic students have not been identified as a group needing special consideration.

[3]There were more places available for black students than students who wanted to fill them. In 1995-96, the school had 152 regular-program slots available for black 9th graders, but only 89 African American students selected Pulaski as one of their three top choices. In contrast, there were more white applicants than available openings: in 1995-96, 92 slots for white students and 101 white 8th graders who named Pulaski as one of their top picks. The next year, there were many fewer spaces in Pulaski for African American 9th graders (only 48) and many more for whites (172); nonetheless, a higher proportion of white students than of black ones gained admission to Pulaski as one of their top three choices.

be there: In a school system where the majority of all students are African American, some black students are likely not to get any of their top picks, especially if, as a number of teachers and others suggested, they prefer to attend a school close to home (a large part of Milwaukee's African American population lives in the northern part of the city) rather than to travel long distances by bus.

Both the principal and the teachers espouse an ideology of treating all students the same and say that they carry this out in practice.[4] The resource support teacher relayed the general consensus among teachers at Pulaski that students from different ethnic groups fit in, mix well, and generally get along. MDRC researchers saw no evidence of interracial tensions during their visits and heard of no major instances of conflict. At the same time, limited observation tended to confirm another teacher's perception that students pal around principally with members of their own ethnic groups.

Economic status. Pulaski appears to be more homogeneous economically than it is ethnically, with most students coming from low-income, working-class, or lower-middle-class backgrounds. Data from the 1990 U.S. Census were used to examine the socioeconomic status of the census tracts from which 9th graders in the research cohorts were drawn. The data indicate that in 1990, about one-quarter of all families living in these census tracts had incomes below the poverty line and that median family income was approximately $23,000. During the 1993-94 school year, 53 percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

Attendance and academic performance. At the outset of the demonstration, the attendance and performance of Pulaski students gave ample cause for concern. In 1992-93, the school had an attendance rate of 72 percent; and in 1993-94, two-thirds of all students registered 10 or more excused absences of at least a half a day in length each semester. By the middle of the academic year, it was not uncommon to see 9th-grade classes with formal enrollments in the mid-20s but in which 15 or fewer students were actually present.

Pulaski students' GPAs, as well as the percentage of 9th graders passing English and algebra, ranked well below the average for all Milwaukee high schools. Milwaukee Public Schools statistics for the 1992-93 school year, which were used to help select an appropriate site for the demonstration, indicate that the average Pulaski student's GPA was only 1.48, nearly two-thirds of the students scored below the national average on the Iowa Basic Skills Test, and nearly half of first-time 9th graders failed algebra.[5] Owing to poor attendance and performance, 47 percent of entering freshmen left Pulaski before receiving a diploma.[6] African American students at Pulaski fared especially badly: Data for the 1995-96 school year indicate that attendance rates of black 9th graders were lower than those of white and Hispanic students during the first marking

[4]Some teachers, however, told the interviewer that they had heard or seen other teachers (although not necessarily those in Project Transition) express sentiments or take actions that they construed as racist.

[5]Algebra is a required course for all Milwaukee 9th-grade students.

[6]It is not known whether some of these students continued at and ultimately graduated from a different high school.

period and declined more sharply over the course of the school year.[7] African American 9th graders also had substantially lower GPAs and much higher course failure rates than white or Hispanic students.

C. Teachers' Explanations of Students' Performance

Teachers' rationales for their students' academic performance may help to explain the measures they take to improve that performance. In interviews conducted both before the demonstration began and its conclusion, teachers commonly attributed Pulaski students' low achievement to their poor attendance, and they related both these phenomena to the seriousness and pervasiveness of problems in students' lives outside school.[8] The teachers often described students' families as unsupportive of regular attendance or achievement and sometimes as highly troubled, as the following comments demonstrate:

> There are lots of things in the outside world over which I have no control that interfere with attendance: parents who are drug addicts or alcoholics, who need to have kids take care of them. . . . I could have a wonderful class, but if their parents don't give the idea that school is important, students may not come.
>
> Students' lifestyles are obstacles to reaching them. Parents don't care about education — they feel you don't need to learn anything. There's no longer a stigma to dropping out.
>
> Many times parents collude in the kids' absence — for instance, they permit them to stay home to babysit for younger children. Or, the student complains that school is boring and parents let them stay home. This is because students are spoiled and because they're allowed to — today's children in general are able to manipulate their parents. . . . Students would be more honest if, instead of claiming boredom, they said they didn't want to go, instead of blaming the school, when often they're only here half the day. And who says life shouldn't be a little boring?

Some Pulaski 9th graders confront issues in their personal lives that are unquestionably serious — especially considering the fact that the students are usually only 14 or 15 years old — and that could well interfere with their ability to concentrate and to learn. One Project Transition teacher told the interviewer that in the preceding four months, one student had told him about a domestic abuse situation; another had confided that he thought he had AIDS; and a third had asked the teacher's advice about whether to remain committed to her boyfriend, who had just been sentenced to a long prison term.

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[7]Attendance rates during the first marking period were 77, 86, and 82 percent for black, Hispanic, and white students, respectively. By the sixth (and last) marking period, these had declined to 48, 65, and 63 percent, respectively.

[8]Unfortunately, there are no data on teachers' predemonstration beliefs that would allow researchers to determine whether these had changed in any way.

Teachers did not offer as an explanation the possibility that the quality of instruction or other aspects of the school environment might themselves be a problem that might deter some students from attending regularly — that if classes seemed a little or very boring or irrelevant to students, or if the environment itself felt unwelcoming and anonymous, then students might opt out of coming, especially in the face of lengthy commutes and other obstacles. That Pulaski teachers did not articulate these school-related reasons for students' attendance and performance is not surprising. A substantial body of education research indicates that teachers see student learning as determined by factors outside their control (Lortie, 1975). The Pulaski principal acknowledged the teachers' resistance to scrutinizing themselves and their colleagues, commenting, "One of the toughest nuts to crack is convincing teachers that they need to look at things differently, pedagogically and kidwise." He speculated that attacks leveled at the Milwaukee Public Schools by politicians, the business community, and others had left teachers highly defensive and reluctant to engage in self-criticism. Whatever the explanation, some Project Transition teachers did not acknowledge a need and did not seem motivated to examine and change their own classroom practices, a key goal of some parties to the demonstration.[9]

D. Inside the Classroom

On any given day, the most gifted teacher can appear uninspired, and a well-planned lesson may run amok; conversely, a habitually ill-prepared teacher can hit on a topic that fires students' imagination. On the basis of the researchers' limited classroom observations, it was therefore neither feasible nor desirable to attempt to characterize the styles of individual teachers or to generalize about the quality of Pulaski students' educational experience. The observations do suggest, however, that most freshmen at Pulaski encountered a range of instructional styles and practices in their core classes. Two English classes, both focusing on grammar, illustrate this diversity.

Observation 1. One class was designed to be participatory and to enable students to learn from each other; students also had some degree of choice in how they spent class time. The lesson concerned the rules of capitalization. Students were handed an exercise sheet of sentences

[9]As with other students, teachers generally ascribed African American students' lower academic performance to the students' own behavior and attitudes (including the fact that fewer black students had selected Pulaski as their first-choice school) and did not give much credence to alternative explanations. A meeting attended by Milwaukee Public Schools officials, Pulaski administrators, Project Transition teachers, and the MDRC researcher exemplifies their mode of thinking. The meeting began with teachers from the different teams describing the integrated curriculum units and professional development activities they were undertaking or considering. Milwaukee Public Schools officials then raised the issue of ethnic disparities in academic performance; they suggested the possibility that the school might be an intimidating place for black students and noted that some African American students at the school had reported that "teachers are writing us off and paying attention to white kids because they're better prepared." The teachers disputed both contentions, maintaining that they gave all students equal treatment. Reflecting on the meeting the next day, a teacher commented that it was unusual in that teachers "pushed to take care of their own concerns," rather than those of Milwaukee Public Schools, first — clearly implying that racial disparities in performance were not one of the teachers' major concerns.

This situation may change as all Pulaski teachers complete a course of in-service efficacy training. This training emphasizes that teachers need to perceive all students as capable of meeting high standards and of performing at higher-than-present levels. Efficacy training also provides specific strategies for improving learning, such as constant and immediate feedback to students.

printed entirely in lower-case type and asked to identify the words in each sentence that should be capitalized. The teacher called on individual students to say which words they had capitalized; after each response, she then asked the rest of the class whether they agreed or disagreed with the student's answer and why. Many students raised their hands to answer each of the questions, and the requirement that students listen to each other's answers kept most students on task. The teacher's voice and the voices of the students were heard in roughly equal measure. After this part of the class was completed, the teacher told the students they could either begin their homework assignment or read rough drafts of one another's papers to catch grammar and spelling errors before turning in a final copy later in the week.

Observation 2. The other class was entirely teacher directed, with almost no exchange between teacher and students or among students. The teacher had previously told the interviewer that she wanted students to know the parts of a sentence so that they would be better writers. This lesson concerned identifying the direct object, the indirect object, the predicative nominative, and the predicative adjective. Working individually, students were assigned to complete four pages of worksheets, filling in the blanks with the words that represented these sentence parts. Most students appeared to get the gist of the task, although some clearly did not. The class was silent as students did their work; the teacher remained at the front of the room throughout. The students appeared to the observer to be working quite slowly, and the assignment took up the full class period. (One student spent about 20 minutes on one worksheet page and then another 15 minutes painstakingly whiting out the answers.)

The majority of the classes observed were teacher directed, in that teachers defined the contents of the lessons and shaped the nature of teacher-student interactions, often by directing questions toward individual students or toward the class as a whole. Sometimes these questions were more effective in sparking students' interest than others.

Observation 3. Of the 28 students enrolled in a science class, 16 were present. The students had studied energy and engines that run by means of heat, with car engines as an example. To review for an exam scheduled later in the week, the teacher had brought in a working car engine so that the students could see the different parts in action. The class was extremely quiet, with the teacher having to pull responses out of the students as he asked them to identify the engine parts and describe how they worked. The students gave brief answers and then fell silent again. The teacher, who had studied engineering, seemed excited to have the engine and be able to "fire it up," but his enthusiasm did not seem to carry over to the students.

Observation 4. The review lesson in a civics class concerned the branches of government. The teacher was able to draw the students into it by asking questions that helped them relate the material to their lives, past discussions in the class, current events, and so forth. In the course of the class, students interacted with the material in the text, with her, and with one another. Every now and then, a side conversation or two cropped up and went on too long, and the teacher had to bring the students back to the focus of the group. By and large, the students were fairly engaged in the discussion, which went on until the end of the class. However, it was sometimes hard to link together the discussions of separate questions; the teacher's effort to bring the topics alive may have distracted some students from grasping the larger points.

Teachers sometimes employed cooperative learning techniques, having students work in groups.

Observation 5. The science class was studying measurement and undertaking a project that asked them to measure the area of their classroom as if in preparation to purchase carpeting. The day before, students had organized themselves into groups of four or five. At the beginning of the class, the teacher handed out yardsticks and a problem sheet, and the students immediately began gathering up their teams and making sure they understood which area of the room they were to measure. Before long, students were crawling along the floor to make the measurements. In some teams, there was active collaboration among all team members; in others, one member did almost all the measuring and calculating, while the others watched and did minor tasks; however, all but one team remained fairly to very much on task and involved in the problems until the bell rang. The teacher walked around from team to team, seeing how they were doing with the assignment and answering students' questions. He expressed uncertainty about why one team had had such difficulty working together but said he would keep an eye on them.

Students generally enjoyed groupwork. Said one, "You can learn better, because someone else in your group is likely to understand it better than you and explain it." Another student commented, "Each person has areas that they're better at. Friends explain things better, because they use your own words." And, a third student opined, "It's funner." Sometimes, however, classes embodied only the form of cooperative learning, not the spirit.

Observation 6. In preparation for a presentation by a speaker from an advocacy organization for the mentally ill, students were to learn about various mental illnesses. The speaker had left leaflets and pamphlets about various illnesses, which were listed on the chalkboard. Students were instructed to copy the name of the illnesses into their notebooks, take a pamphlet, and take notes in their notebooks on the illness discussed in their pamphlet. Students were told they could work in groups and share what they were learning; most students moved their desks into groups of two or three but worked on their own and did not talk with each other about the material they were reading. Many students simply copied directly from pamphlets into notebooks. One pamphlet began, "Schizophrenia is one of the most debilitating mental illnesses." Two students copied the sentence verbatim; asked what *debilitating* meant, neither knew the answer nor tried to find out, and they clearly did not grasp the concept (expressed in the pamphlet) that people with schizophrenia often believe they "hear voices." Although there were some off-task conversations, all the students eventually complied with the assignment.

As in this class, in many other classes that were observed, students spent most of the class period seated quietly at their desks, copying material or doing text and workbook exercises and problems. Most class seatwork tasks, while not very stimulating, seemed to have an instructional purpose that could be grasped readily. One exception was an assignment in which 9th graders were instructed to color in on a map of the United States the geographical areas covered by the branch offices of a federal agency. The activity did keep the students in their seats and quiet, however.

In addition, teachers frequently allowed students to do homework assignments for the last 20 minutes or so of the class, in part to be sure that students understood the work. Thus, although

teachers reported on the teacher survey that they assigned an average of 2.4 hours of homework per week (i.e., half an hour a night), most students participating in focus groups, when asked about the amount of time they spent on homework, said they were able to complete it in their classes or study halls (or, as one reported, on the bus ride home). Some teachers said that it would be futile to assign more work, since students would not do it. In any event, because so much of the class period was given over to seatwork and homework, teachers sometimes spent no more than half the class introducing new material or engaging the class in group discussion or review.

These observations suggest that at Pulaski, as at all schools, instruction could be interesting or dull, exciting or alienating, and that as with students' academic performance, the performance of the teachers as a group indicated room for expansion of the skills and ways of thinking they brought to the classroom.

III. Getting Project Transition Up and Running

A. Winning Support for the Intervention

MDRC was committed to having a demonstration site up and running at the start of the 1995-96 school year and, with this objective in view, began discussions with the Milwaukee Public Schools representatives in the summer of 1994 about implementing Project Transition in a Milwaukee high school. Milwaukee Public Schools officials were interested in the intervention because they hoped it would be a catalyst for inducing educational reform in schools that had not yet undergone significant change. As one put it, "We hoped Project Transition would be the back door to restructuring . . . refocusing the way teaching and learning take place, effecting changes in the way people think about work and each other." Officials viewed the model as consistent with their objectives of transforming large, impersonal comprehensive high schools into smaller, more personalized learning environments and of reducing the isolation of both students and teachers. Officials were willing to support the cost of reducing Project Transition teachers' class loads from five to four classes a day to enable teachers to have a common planning period while retaining individual preparation and "duty periods" (i.e., periods during which they were assigned to cover hallways, study halls, etc.).[10]

Pulaski was one of four Milwaukee high schools considered as potential sites for Project Transition on the basis of their indicators of need, the absence of other major reforms (which otherwise might confound the research results), and the interest and commitment of the schools' principals. The other schools were eliminated for various reasons that included inadequate sample sizes, the presence of several vocational cluster programs for freshmen, and weak leadership or teaching staff.

In contrast, Pulaski, a school that had not yet undergone substantial reform and at which Project Transition could therefore make a major impact, seemed an appropriate and attractive site

[10]Officials favored a four-course load on principle; they also hoped that by continuing to be responsible for duty periods, Project Transition teachers would escape the possible resentment of other teachers.

for the project. Conversations with students indicated that the environment was fairly impersonal; Project Transition could help reduce students' feelings of anonymity. Teachers largely worked in isolation; the project's team meetings could lead to a greater degree of cooperation. Observations revealed that classes, except for science labs, were heavily teacher centered, with many teachers using worksheets as central classroom activities; the resource support teacher and other avenues for staff development afforded by Project Transition could expand and improve instructional practices.

The school did not appear to pose particular implementation or evaluation difficulties. Moreover, the school's principal was committed to trying new ideas that would help freshmen — he was quoted in the Milwaukee *Journal Sentinel* as saying that something needed to be done for 9th graders and that most of the school's current efforts were not working — and he was mindful of MDRC's promise that if the intervention proved successful, it would be widely replicated.

Once the decision was made to move forward with Pulaski, the next step was to gain support for the initiative from the teachers. MDRC staff distributed a concept paper describing the project and its rationale and met with faculty members over a couple of days. The project was portrayed as a support for both teachers and students. But the meetings did not engage the teachers in an extended discussion of the problems that the intervention was intended to counter. In particular, they did not expose teachers to the idea that Project Transition should be a vehicle for improving instruction — perhaps because, as noted in Chapter 1, MDRC staff members were themselves of different minds about the degree to which they should emphasize the program's pedagogical goals as well as its structural features. Pulaski personnel were left unclear about the specific pathways that would lead to better outcomes; as the principal later recalled, "I think the basic premise was that you could put kids in families, move them together, and learning would increase."

Milwaukee Public Schools representatives, Pulaski officials, and MDRC agreed that the project would be implemented if, in a December 1994 faculty vote, at least 70 percent of the teachers voted in favor of it. In fact, only 60 percent of the teachers voted for the initiative, while 34 percent voted against it and 6 percent abstained — a substantial majority but not the ringing endorsement that had been hoped for.[11] The principal still actively supported the initiative, and he met with department heads and other influential faculty members to win their acceptance of it. Once it was certain that Project Transition would move forward at Pulaski, he delegated responsibility for overseeing implementation — including recruiting teachers and arranging students' schedules — to his second-in-command administrator, one of the school's four assistant principals.

Thus, from the beginning, Project Transition was seen as an initiative that was imported to Pulaski from outside and imposed from above rather than developed through teacher input. It was also implemented hastily. Given MDRC's and the Milwaukee Public Schools' commitment

[11]MDRC staff tried to understand the meaning of the vote. They speculated, for example, that the initiative had not been adequately marketed; that many teachers felt dissatisfied and disempowered; that teachers and others had not fully grappled with the need for reform; and that the initiative felt insufficiently "homegrown" and too driven by outsiders, whether from the central office or MDRC.

to starting by the beginning of the 1995-96 academic year, less than one semester was available for planning, and teachers had little opportunity to develop "ownership" of all the elements of the program model or a shared vision of the project's goals; in particular, they did not see the project as a stimulus for their own professional development.[12] It seems likely that the way Project Transition was introduced to Pulaski, and its lack of a homegrown identity, may have affected its subsequent implementation.

In opting to work with Pulaski, MDRC had to make one important concession. As noted in Chapter 1, MDRC had hoped to implement Project Transition so as to avoid tracking students along lines of academic ability. This did not prove possible. Pulaski had traditionally offered special classes, known as Program for the Academically Talented (PAT) classes, in English, math, and social studies to freshmen entering the school with strong records of academic achievement in middle school, and the school's guidance counselors, in particular, saw the PAT classes as essential for attracting better students to the school. They argued that if PAT classes were not offered at Pulaski, parents of students eligible for the program would send their sons and daughters to a school that did offer them. The exigencies of scheduling within families as well as for the PAT classes meant that PAT students taking English, math, and social studies together were also likely to take science together, but the continued existence of the PAT classes was clearly nonnegotiable. The PAT classes were assigned to two different family clusters over the two years of the demonstration so that different teachers would have the opportunity to teach classes of academically more able students.

B. Selecting Teachers for the Project

At the outset, it was decided that entering 9th graders in the school's automotive technology program would not be assigned to Project Transition. But for several weeks, the size of the rest of the 9th-grade class remained unclear, and initially, it appeared that only two teacher teams would be required. The assistant principal initially recruited two teams (one of which had already worked together for a year with a small cluster of 30 low-performing students) and several alternates; eventually, when it became evident that a third team was needed, its members were selected largely from among the alternates. Although the assistant principal assigned the teachers who had not previously worked together to the two remaining teams, and the teachers had no say about who their teammates would be, they generally expressed satisfaction with their teams' composition.[13] Teachers were told that they were making a two-year commitment to the project.

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[12]A year and a half into the demonstration, a teacher remarked to the interviewer, "I've always wondered what Project Transition is trying to achieve." At the demonstration's conclusion, another teacher, commenting on the success she and her teammates had experienced in working cooperatively, said, "I don't know what else MDRC wanted in terms of goals."

[13]In one case, this may have reflected the teachers' general unwillingness to speak ill of their colleagues. One team member was viewed by her teammates as participating only minimally in team activities, but they were reluctant to criticize her. By the end of the demonstration, too, tensions were emerging within the group of teachers who had been together the longest, and one teacher on that team opted to transfer to another team where a vacancy had been created by a teacher's retirement. The teacher speculated that teams have a "natural life," after which a shake-up in their membership may be beneficial, keeping teachers fresh and giving them new ideas.

Interviewed more than two years later, 10 of the 12 teachers asserted that they had volunteered for the Project Transition.[14] Some teachers remembered being eager to do so. A teacher who had only recently come to Pulaski, for example, said that she had joined the project hoping to get support from the other members of her team, while another teacher was influenced by his highly positive experiences as a team member at a middle school several years earlier. For some teachers, however, the notion that they had readily enlisted for the project may represent a bit of retrospective falsification: The principal recalled that despite the inducement of a reduced courseload, the assistant principal had had to be "very persuasive" and to work hard to line up 12 teachers. Staffing Project Transition was complicated by the fact that high school teachers in Milwaukee generally teach both freshmen and upper-level classes, and, according to the principal, "teachers weren't banging down the doors to teach [only] 9th graders."[15] Another consideration was that some teachers' licenses limited them to teaching more general 9th-grade courses so that they were natural choices for the Project Transition teams. As the assistant principal pointed out, he did not have 100 percent control over the selection pool.

The 12 teachers who were selected for Project Transition varied in their demographic characteristics and levels of experience. They included five white men, four white women, and three black women and ranged in age from 27 to 60 at the outset of the demonstration. Three of the 12 had a master's degree. On joining Project Transition, the most experienced teacher had taught for 35 years, the least experienced for half a year. Their length of time at Pulaski ranged from half a year to 17 years.

C. Identifying the Resource Support Teacher and the Learning Resource Partner

From the beginning, all parties agreed that the resource support teacher should be hired from within the Milwaukee Public Schools system rather than from an academic institution. The decision was also reached to hire someone from outside Pulaski, in order to avoid potential conflicts of interest, and to make the position full time, so that the resource support teacher would not have competing teaching responsibilities. Finally, it was suggested that the role be assumed by a current or former "mentor teacher," a Milwaukee Public Schools position created for experienced teachers who were released from teaching responsibilities and who each provided full-time mentoring to about 10 student teachers. Only two candidates applied for the position; both were interviewed by Project Transition teachers and Pulaski administrators.

The man selected to be the resource support teacher conducted and expressed himself well during the interview and seemed well suited for the job. A former English teacher, he had

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[14]Of the remaining teachers, one said that she had been assigned to the project by the assistant principal but was glad to have joined it; the other maintained that she had been drafted — "stuck right in the program" — and remained disgruntled throughout.

[15]A focus group conducted with three teachers who were not part of Project Transition echoed the principal's assessment. The focus-group participants noted that many teachers do not like to teach freshmen because of the students' lack of maturity. Said one, "They [freshmen] come out of middle school little animals. They don't grow up 'til after Christmas." While two of the teachers said that they would enjoy being part of a team, the third said that she felt she would be just as effective, if not more so, if she had a little more time to plan her lessons than if she had to use that time for sharing. She commented that she liked to close the door to her classroom, do her thing, and "basically be responsible to your own conscience."

been a mentor teacher for three years, during which time he had received what one teacher described as "glowing reports," and he had actually worked with a few of the Project Transition teachers at the outset of their teaching careers. He was also an active member of the teachers' union.

In conversations and written communications with the resource support teacher, MDRC staff sought to clarify his role and responsibilities. These responsibilities specifically included helping teachers to structure their daily team meetings, observing classes to identify ways in which teachers could improve their instruction and interactions with students, and helping teachers take the steps to make those improvements. The resource support teacher was urged to think of himself as "not just providing requested information but also as proactively determining ways to help teachers in creating the Project Transition environment for their students." He received no special preservice or in-service training on how to accomplish these objectives, however. Such training might well have facilitated his work, as is discussed in Chapter 7.

Alverno College, an undergraduate college with a focus on teaching, was designated as the learning resource partner. Located on the south side of Milwaukee only a few minutes' drive from Pulaski, Alverno was known throughout the area for its work on performance assessment and for its professional development activities for current teachers and was strongly engaged with the Milwaukee schools. (Indeed, three of the Project Transition teachers were Alverno graduates.) An Alverno professor was named to work with and to provide technical assistance to the Project Transition staff and the resource support teacher.

D. Preparing Teachers for the Initiative

One month before the demonstration began, 10 of the 12 Project Transition teachers attended a week-long summer institute at Alverno. (One teacher was ill, and another had made plans for the week long beforehand.)

The institute drew mixed reviews. It was conducted as part of a larger Alverno summer institute on learning assessment, because Alverno staff believed it was important for Project Transition staff to gain exposure to the concepts being conveyed in the assessment workshop. Accordingly, the Pulaski teachers were slated to spend an hour or two each morning with the entire group of 100 teachers and then to turn their attention to Project Transition issues. This arrangement proved to be a source of conflict, because the Pulaski teachers tended to regard the larger workshop as serving Alverno's agenda, which was unclear to them, rather than their own and as distracting them from what they most wanted to do — to talk about implementing Project Transition. As a Pulaski teacher later explained, "While teachers wanted to 'get moving' and 'get practical,' Alverno offered theories instead of 'how-tos.'" They therefore resisted the faculty member's efforts to draw connections between the two sets of concepts and activities. Further, a clash between the Alverno faculty member and one Project Transition teacher, who was strongly supported by members of her team, set the stage for poor future working relations between that team and Alverno.

On the other hand, MDRC observers reported that the Pulaski teachers attending the institute were buoyed by the experience of meeting with enthusiastic and energetic teachers from

another Milwaukee high school that had already introduced teacher teams and that the institute helped to forge a sense of team identity and to give the teachers a feeling of unity and autonomy.

IV. The Demonstration Period

A. An Overview

The teachers inaugurated Project Transition with a picnic for the entering freshmen and their parents a few days before school began. Attended by some 300 students and parents, the picnic was regarded as a highly successful event that set the demonstration off on a promising path.

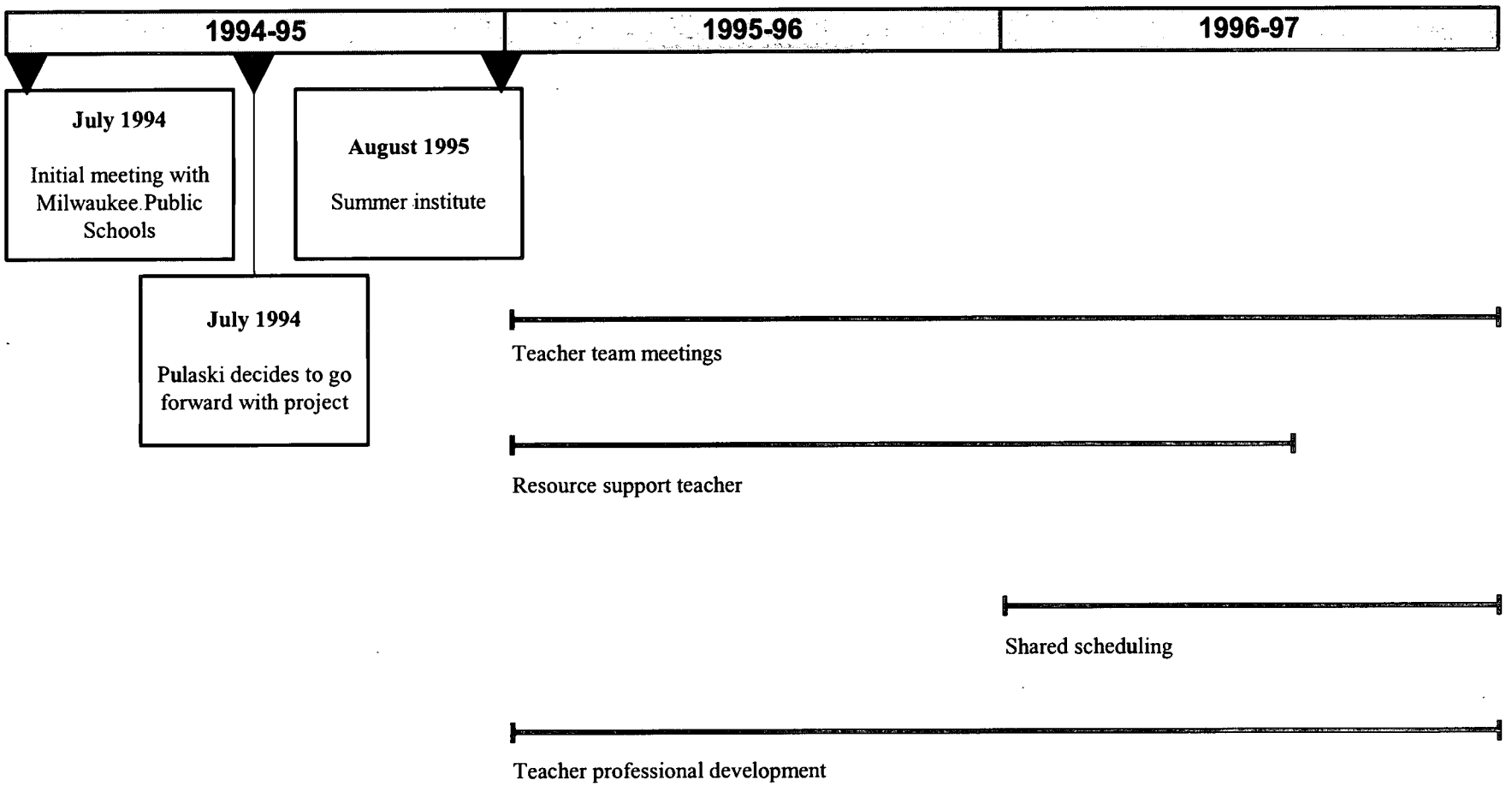
The subsequent record of Project Transition was one of both continuity and change, as suggested by Figure 2.1, which presents a timeline showing which program elements were in place during particular months of the demonstration. The teacher teams themselves remained fairly stable both in their composition and in their broad patterns of functioning. From the outset, for example, some teams appeared more task focused and some generated more participation among all team members than others. (One team, in particular, functioned largely as a dyad of two teachers, with the other teachers less fully engaged.) Over time, however, some things did change. One of the most important of these was the quality of relationships among teachers. Many teachers asserted that they became more comfortable with their fellow team members and more adept in mounting integrated projects, some of which were so successful that they garnered coverage in the local press. In both years of the demonstration, the Alverno College professor provided occasional support to the project; in the second year, her work was limited to one of the three teams.

In terms of the program model and its implementation, perhaps the most significant change was in the degree to which students shared their core classes. In the first year of the demonstration, students were assigned to teacher-student clusters but did not share classes with many other students within these families. The demonstration was extended in part so that this program component could be implemented more fully, as occurred during the second year.

During the first year of the demonstration, all three Project Transition teams shared a common planning period, and the 12 project teachers held regular biweekly meetings during that hour. Teachers on different teams who taught the same subject were also able to meet regularly during this time; one science teacher commented that this had been especially useful, because the science teachers were piloting a new curriculum.

During the second year, however, one teacher team met during a different hour than the others so that full-group teacher team meetings had to be held after school and occurred only once a month. Attendance at these meetings was not mandatory, and a number of teachers either could not come because of other commitments (e.g., coaching an athletic team) or chose not to. In general, teachers perceived the second-year full-group team meetings to be less helpful than those during the first year. For one thing, while high-level Milwaukee Public Schools officials believed that they were expressing support for the initiative by attending the meetings, the teachers, as noted previously, often felt that the officials were concerned with pushing their own

Figure 2.1
Implementation of Project Transition Elements



agenda, rather than with responding to the teachers' priorities.[16] For another, the meetings were sometimes seen as a playing field for interteam rivalries; when teams described their activities, for instance, they tended to mention only their accomplishments, not the stumbling blocks and frustrations they had encountered. A teacher noted that it seemed less like sharing than "bragging."

The exigencies of scheduling precluded time for subject-area teachers to interact during the second year. Teachers reported that they heard a little about what their colleagues were doing through casual hallway or teachers' lounge conversations. But they often found these conversations to be of somewhat limited usefulness; the general reaction seemed to be that what other teachers were doing might be fine for those teachers but that they themselves were doing something different.

With regard to the role and activities of the resource support teacher, lack of change was generally perceived by Project Transition teachers and MDRC staff members alike as reflective of his inability to develop a more helpful, proactive role. When he left for another job midway through the second year, the money reserved for his salary was used to pay for two paraprofessionals (one full-time equivalent) whose time was split among the 12 teachers. Team leaders were designated for each of the teams, and one of these assumed the resource support teacher's responsibilities as the liaison with MDRC, other high school personnel, and Milwaukee Public Schools officials.

Throughout the period, the school's principal remained supportive of the project and provided broad oversight to it. At the beginning and end of each school year, he was instrumental in determining the scope of program operations. In between, his attention to the project was fairly limited: He attended the monthly meetings of all team teachers and chatted with them informally about what they were doing, but neither he nor the assistant principal attended the small-group teacher team meetings.[17] Looking back, the principal described this level of administrative involvement with the project as appropriate given the relatively small amount of funding it entailed: By his reckoning, Project Transition accounted for about $180,000 of Pulaski's $8 million annual budget.[18] This degree of involvement was also consistent with his own sense of what was necessary to achieve wider replication; as he put it, "You don't tie up a quarter of your administrative team for a portion of a day every day."

Once the project was up and running, the administrators left it to the teachers and the resource support teacher to negotiate their relationships and to define their roles as they saw fit. While generally supportive of the resource support teacher, the administrators did not take par-

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[16]Project Transition teachers nonetheless greatly appreciated the fact that senior Milwaukee Public Schools officials made additional resources available for such items as calculators, field trips, and English-Spanish dictionaries.

[17]The assistant principal, for his part, believed that the teachers felt hampered by his presence at their meetings, as if he were there largely to check on their attendance.

[18]In citing the $180,000 cost, the principal seems to have had in mind the *marginal* cost of adding Project Transition to the school, rather than the *total* cost of serving Project Transition students, who comprised over half Pulaski's 9th graders. Included in the full $8 million budget are the salaries of the 12 Project Transition teachers, the time guidance counselors spent working with Project Transition students, and a host of other costs associated with serving students in the project.

ticular measures to strengthen his position (e.g., by informing the teachers that part of his job entailed observing their classes to offer constructive suggestions about curriculum and teaching techniques).[19] They also left it to the individual teams to figure out how they wanted to use the resources provided by Alverno.[20]

The remainder of this section considers each of the four key components of the Project Transition model over the two-year demonstration period.

B. Teacher-Student Clusters

In both years of the demonstration, the 9th-grade class was divided into three student-teacher clusters, labeled K, N, and R. During the planning period, MDRC staff had explained to teachers and administrators that shared scheduling did not necessarily mean that groups of 30 or so students would move together to all their core-subject classes and that a lesser amount of shared scheduling would be acceptable. What this might mean in concrete terms was not specified, however. Several teachers were mistrustful of the entire concept, because they had had negative experiences with a small, rowdy group of students in a vocational program who had taken their core classes together and who had posed many discipline problems. In addition, the assistant principal, who was responsible for arranging students' class schedules, was hesitant to institute shared scheduling, because it entailed changing the computer program that generated students' schedules. Given this opposition, and its own lack of an operational definition of the practice, MDRC retreated from insisting that shared scheduling be implemented, and during the first year of the demonstration, students were essentially distributed at random among classes taught by their cluster teachers.

This arrangement accomplished the objective of teaming from the teachers' perspective: It gave each teacher team a group of students whose progress and problems they could discuss. But it did not further Project Transition's goal of creating small, cohesive groups of 9th graders whose members knew each other well and felt connected to each other as well as to their teachers. An analysis of freshman students' schedules disclosed the very limited extent to which students shared classes with other students in their family at the beginning of the academic year;[21] it also showed that in November (by which time some students had been added to or dropped from their classes and some students were no longer attending regularly), students shared classes with even fewer students than in the beginning of the year.

Since schedules had not been set up to allow students to get to know each other well, it is not surprising that a student focus group held in December 1995 suggested that the demonstra-

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[19]One observer speculated that administrators were reluctant to undertake actions that could incur opposition from the union, as might have occurred had a teacher been authorized to observe other teachers. In addition, administrators were doubtful that the resource support teacher could be effective with some teachers.

[20]Their distance from the project is exemplified by the fact that the assistant principal was unaware that only one team had any contact with Alverno College during the demonstration's second year.

[21]The analysis examined the "average" student in each of two English classes and how many classes that student shared with other students. It found that the average student in one English class shared three additional classes with only three other students; she shared one additional class with 10 other students and no additional classes with nine other students.

tion was having little or no effect on increasing 9th graders' sense of connection to their peers. Students generally reported knowing their classmates by name but cited no more than two to five students as people they knew well; they also told the researchers that they never discussed schoolwork with their classmates. Another focus group conducted two months later suggested that the situation had not improved.

The researchers were concerned that the failure to implement shared scheduling was resulting in the same impersonal environment for students that had existed before the demonstration began and that there would be little basis for expecting the intervention to produce positive results. MDRC staff proposed to extend the demonstration for a second year, partly on the condition that shared scheduling be put in place. This met with considerable resistance on the part of the teachers. Teachers voiced fears that if groups of students attended all their classes together, grievances and arguments between students that developed in one class would escalate over the course of the day and sour the atmosphere in subsequent classes, students could ally against teachers, and students leaving one class en masse for the next one would create disorder in the halls.

The difficulty was eased when MDRC, driven by the need to develop an operational definition of shared scheduling that could be used in Kansas City as well as Milwaukee, proposed a specific plan for arranging students' schedules. Under this scheme, the average student had an opportunity to spend time with approximately 38 other students over the course of the day, sharing all four core academic classes with 12 classmates and two classes with the remaining 26. The plan seemed to allay the teachers' fears that shared scheduling would inevitably mean a large bloc of students taking all their core academic classes together, with its attendant image of a mass of young people sweeping through the halls. Under these circumstances, Pulaski administrators and faculty accepted the plan, and it was implemented during the second year of the demonstration.[22]

The principal later maintained, both forcefully and plausibly, that if MDRC had held to its initial position that shared scheduling was a critical element of the program model, it would have been implemented during the program's first year. In retrospect, it also seems likely that if MDRC had formulated a specific plan for shared scheduling before the demonstration began, it might have been accepted at that point. To some extent, the problem may have been that teachers and MDRC staff never articulated their visions of what shared scheduling meant — visions that were not all that different in practice — and, therefore, failed to explore possible areas of compromise.

Students' reactions to shared scheduling were fairly positive, as their responses in focus groups indicate. The students generally agreed that shared scheduling enabled them to know more people than they would have otherwise. For one thing, sharing classes with other students was a topic they used to break the ice in introducing themselves and becoming friends with other students. As students explained:

[22]This took the assistant principal a week of laborious hand scheduling. He had to rearrange schedules yet again in the middle of the second year to accommodate the large number of students who failed the first semester of algebra and were required to repeat the course.

> [You say,] "You have this class — how do you get there?" Pretty soon you just start talking to people. You ask if they want to walk to class together.
>
> You show people your schedule to see if you got the same classes and start talking about what classes you had together, and then they were like, "Do you want to walk with me to next hour because you have the same class?"
>
> If you just go up to people and say, "Hi, my name is so-and-so," they're just going to look at you and think you're weird.

Shared scheduling seemed to help the freshmen develop greater feelings of security. As one boy said, "You can make good friends in classes and be in touch with them during the day." Many students reported that most of their 9th-grade friends came from within their small-group clusters.

Although the students realized that one disadvantage of the concept was that they might not get to meet new people, many were not particularly troubled by this fact, especially early on. Asked how he felt about seeing the same faces all the time, one student replied, "I'm never bored because there's always someone to talk to." The student acknowledged that he felt more comfortable talking with students on his team than with other students. Another student said, "There aren't too many people I'd like to meet besides the people I know now." Students felt that they were able to make friends more readily.

By mid-year, more students commented that shared scheduling was becoming boring and expressed a desire to be more involved with other students and the school as a whole. Two students expressed their ambivalence:

> In a way I like it, but in a way I don't, because you don't get to talk to that many freshmen. You kind of feel like a little kid still.
>
> Next year, we'll have to start all over again in meeting people, but in a way it's good. You could at least have some classes the way it is now, but not all of them. The good thing is having friends you can hang out with and talk to — but it gets boring with the same people, the same jokes.

It seemed to one Milwaukee Public Schools administrator that as the year went on and students gained more confidence (ironically, from being in a supportive team environment), many wanted more experiences outside the team.

Students also recognized some academic advantages of shared scheduling, although this did not emerge as a major theme of their focus-group comments. For instance, all seven students in one focus group reported that they would ask a student in their class if they needed help in a subject, whereas most would not ask all four of their core-subject teachers for assistance. Five of the eight students in another focus group also reported that they studied with other students in their classes.

In contrast to students' generally favorable reactions to shared scheduling, the teachers' responses were for the most part tepid. Some teachers noted that it had not led to the outcomes

they had feared (e.g., groups of students pushing and shouting in the hallways). With a few exceptions, however, most teachers did not believe that this innovation had produced many benefits. They either did not perceive that students knew each other any better during the second year than during the first, or they said that modest increases in familiarity with other students had come with several costs attached: immature behavior, not getting to know as many other 9th graders within their families as in the past, and, as a consequence, the absence of a "larger family feeling." Several teachers expressed concern that students would flounder socially once they reached the 10th grade. They also remained troubled by the possibility that a problem that arose in one core class might travel to the next core class as well, although they conceded that instances of such disturbances were rare. Only one of the 12 teachers interviewed characterized shared scheduling in generally positive terms. He noted that some of the students seemed to be policing themselves and that he had heard some tell their classmates, "You should stay in school today." He believed that students were developing "a kind of conscience" that he had not seen the previous year. Interestingly, this teacher's views were seconded by some of the school guidance counselors, two of whom commented that during the second demonstration year, more students were referring their friends to the guidance department for help than had been the case in the past. Another guidance counselor said he had always liked the concept of teams, in part because teachers on the teams could take on different roles: "sergeant-at-arms," "nurturer," and so forth.

Shared scheduling, however, never engendered strong teacher support, and the assistant principal continued to regard programming students' schedules to enable them to travel together as a major inconvenience. It is not surprising that in deciding what elements of Project Transition to keep or discard after the demonstration period ended, school officials opted to return to having students attend classes within their family clusters, without further subdivisions into smaller groups.

C. Teacher Teams and Their Meetings

Unlike shared scheduling, which was rejected, then implemented, then dropped again, the "teams of four" and their meetings were a stable and extremely popular feature of Project Transition from the outset.[23] In interviews conducted with the Project Transition teachers near the beginning of the demonstration, they virtually uniformly endorsed the concept of team meetings and found them to be valuable, and over the next two years, their support for the concept did not wane.[24] Indeed, in response to a survey administered to the 12 teachers near the end of the demonstration, half expressed the belief that they did not have an adequate amount of time to meet with their colleagues. As one teacher put it, team meetings are the "foundation" of the Project

[23]Only one change in team composition occurred during the demonstration period: When one teacher was promoted to an assistant principalship at another school, he was replaced by a teacher who, by all accounts, was able to fit in easily with the other team members.

[24]The single exception was the teacher who said that she had been "drafted" into Project Transition. She explained that while she got along well with the other members of her team, she preferred to "do her own thing." She said that when she had requested to be relieved of Project Transition responsibilities during the second year so that she could teach juniors and seniors, she was told that she had made a commitment and that once in the program, she had no options. She added, however, that she didn't know any other teachers who wanted to get out of the project.

Transition model; she added that she had rejected the idea about changing to a different school because, among other things, "I wouldn't have my family."

The discussions that took place in the team meetings, which centered on "problem" students and on the development and execution of integrated curriculum units or of field trips associated with these units, are described more fully in Chapter 4. Here, the focus is on the collegial bonds that developed through these meetings and on other aspects of teachers' relationships with each other. Several teachers reported that the teams made their teaching experience much more enjoyable; one noted that contact with her teammates had given her more ambition and energy. They viewed their meeting time as an opportunity to escape the isolation of the classroom and to offer and receive mutual support. One teacher asserted that this was especially important for those teaching freshmen:

> For the first time, I can work with other teachers. By yourself, the general philosophy throughout the Milwaukee Public Schools is that you're a good teacher if you pass students and don't write referrals [for disciplinary action] — in other words, keep the problems hidden. So you don't want 9th graders, because they have more problems, and they come to class, too [i.e., they haven't officially become dropouts]. There's a much heavier burden on 9th-grade teachers. Now I have support — I never had it before.

Teachers also tended to feel that their instructional philosophies and practices were similar to those of their teammates. Thus, on the teacher survey, eight of the 12 teachers expressed disagreement with the statement, "We have little idea of each others' teaching goals and classroom practices."

One reason for this degree of presumed consensus may be that teachers based their comments on what they heard in the team meetings rather than what they saw through direct observation.[25] In fact, although cross-visitation of classes was envisioned by demonstration planners as an important part of the program — a stimulus to think critically about good teaching — few Project Transition teachers visited the classes of their teammates (or of other teachers) to get a sense of their teaching styles, despite the fact that as one teacher put it, the resource support teacher "begged" them to do so. More than halfway through the first demonstration year, only three teachers had observed a colleague's class with the help of the resource support teacher, a fourth teacher had observed a non-Project Transition colleague on his own, and a fifth had signed up to observe but canceled the appointment.

The teachers cited many reasons for not having visited other classes. One relatively new teacher frankly acknowledged, "There's a fear of peers being judgmental of you." Teachers were also generally unwilling to give up either common-planning or individual preparation hours to observe other teachers at work — or to be a substitute teacher — and they expressed reluctance to leave their classes with substitutes (including the resource support teacher), saying that this

[25]In contrast, the researchers' limited observations in many classrooms suggested rather substantial differences among teachers along such dimensions as teacher versus student directedness of activities and use of class time for "skill-and-drill" activities.

would create more work for them; that students would lose out ("A day I'm not there is not a day of good learning for them," commented one teacher); and that a class in which there had been a substitute teacher would be likely to fall off the same schedule as their other classes. Finally, aside from these logistical issues, with some exceptions, many teachers doubted they would learn much from visiting other classrooms.

D. The Resource Support Teacher and Other Supports for Teachers

The resource support teacher. By the end of the first year of the demonstration, most of the teachers had come to feel that they had chosen the wrong person for the resource support teacher position. All but a couple of the 12 Project Transition teachers regarded the resource support teacher as not very helpful. These sentiments are reflected in their responses to the teacher survey: 10 of the 12 teachers disagreed with the statement, "I work closely with the resource support teacher to try out new ideas and resolve problems," and half the teachers reported that their opportunities to receive professional mentoring were less than adequate.

Midway through the demonstration's second year, the resource support teacher announced that he had found another position in the public school system. Ironically, although the teachers had placed little value on his work, they resented the fact that he was able to leave the project early when they were not able to (even if they didn't particularly want to).

What went wrong is a complex story. Part of it was that he encountered resistance from some teachers as a natural function of his role, as discussed further on. The assistant principal also speculated that project teachers might have resented the resource support teacher as a "central office-type person."[26] Part of it was probably a matter of personality: The resource support teacher himself asserted that it was "not his style" to be proactive; several teachers commented that he seemed insecure in his position (and reported that they found this unnerving). Part of it, too, was that despite the assistance he had received from MDRC, he seemed unable to define his role or to translate that role into specific tasks. This left the teachers uncertain about what he was supposed to do, what he actually did, or how he might assist them; and especially at the outset of the demonstration, they tended to believe that the resource support teacher's time was tied up doing things to benefit MDRC rather than to assist them.

In addition, the teachers themselves had a wide range of ideas about what the resource support teacher should do. The comments of one teacher are illustrative:

> It would be beneficial to have a good approach modeled to students. That would involve having me work together with a master teacher, jointly developing lesson plans, maybe, and with us team teaching, although with the master teacher taking on most of the teaching. Ideally, this would be a role for the resource support teacher. That person should be responsible for keeping up with research and letting people know the best teaching practices, so there's a goal of constant improvement and self-assessment. Also, at the beginning of

[26]This perception may have been based on the fact that the resource support teacher frequently left Pulaski for appointments outside the building — sometimes without informing the teachers that he was leaving.

the year, he should do whatever teachers need help with, regardless — including copying and making phone calls.

Some of the functions the teacher proposed required substantial professional expertise, while others could have been performed by clerical or paraprofessional staff. However, the teacher asserted that failure on the part of the resource support teacher to perform essentially paraprofessional tasks would constitute "elitism," and, said the teacher, "There's no place for an elitist attitude in a team situation."

Subsequently, the role the resource support teacher did define for himself might be described as one that would arouse the least resistance, actual or anticipated, from teachers. Sometimes this resistance was very real. The phenomenon of teachers expressing opposition to perceived encroachments on their traditional autonomy within their classrooms has been well documented in the research literature and widely recognized by administrators; as Pulaski's principal remarked, "Few teachers appreciate or want another teacher coming into their classroom and telling them that what they're doing isn't the way to do it — even if the conversation is in terms of, 'Maybe you want to think about doing something else.' The first question is, 'What the hell does he or she know? Try to be creative when you're teaching five classes a day!'" Some Project Transition teachers, especially those who had considerable teaching experience and felt in control of their classrooms, were resistant to such observation.[27] One such teacher told the resource support teacher directly that while he might observe her class, she didn't want feedback; another told the interviewer, "After 25 years, I feel I've been observed and reflected on a lot, with no real valuable feedback." As noted previously, Pulaski administrators did not specify that this was a critical program function; accordingly, the resource support teacher mostly steered clear of their classrooms, visiting them only once or twice over his three semesters at Pulaski.

A few teachers said that the resource support teacher had been very helpful to them. One experienced teacher, for example, was having difficulty with her classes. The resource support teacher team-taught several lessons with her; he also assisted her in developing a lesson plan for teaching a short story that included an introduction of the story, a discussion of the story's central concept, and an analysis of the story's key elements (characters, plot, setting, etc.) and suggested a set of imaginative topics for student compositions. The teacher commented that she appreciated the opportunity to "bounce ideas off" him. Another teacher, for whom the first year of the demonstration at Pulaski was also his first regular teaching job, said that the resource support teacher had helped him regain control of a class through such devices as a new seating chart and intensive use of highly structured seatwork assignments. In short, the resource support teacher excelled in interactions that resembled his prior experience as a mentor teacher.

When the resource support teacher conducted observations in situations where his assistance was not specifically requested, he sometimes did not seem to grasp clearly what teachers wanted (or told the interviewer they wanted). Several teachers said that the resource support teacher had observed their classes several times and had complimented them on various aspects

[27]There is little direct evidence of this from the teacher interviews, since no teacher expressed unwillingness to cooperate with the resource support teacher. However, it was not uncommon to hear teachers report that some of their *colleagues* did not welcome the resource support teacher's presence in their classrooms.

of their classroom practice. The resource support teacher described this as providing needed validation to the teachers. What the teachers told the interviewer they could use, however, was not praise but new ideas and suggestions about things they could do better.

One barrier to observation was that teachers perceived themselves as subject specialists. Many expressed doubt that someone who was not knowledgeable about their subject domain could provide them with much assistance. This doubt was exacerbated, too, by the fact that at the outset, the resource support teacher acknowledged that he felt uncomfortable with math; this made the math teachers doubt he had anything to offer them.[28]

From time to time, the resource support teacher distributed articles he had found interesting or useful to the teachers. However, he did not follow through with discussions of the materials he had sent around. Moreover, the teachers tended to regard the articles as "just more reading" and said they would have preferred abstracts of the material.

By the end of the demonstration, most of the people involved with Project Transition in Milwaukee, from Milwaukee Public Schools officials down to teachers, were ambivalent about whether the role of the resource support teacher was worthwhile, or even feasible. One senior Milwaukee Public Schools administrator, emphasizing the difficulties inherent in the resource support teacher's lack of direct authority over others and need to rely on persuasion to accomplish program goals, concluded, "I'm not convinced the resource support teacher thing works." Some Project Transition teachers felt that the money spent on the resource support teacher could better be spent on other kinds of assistance: paraprofessional aides, for example, or an administrator who would take care of discipline problems within the three families. Other project teachers could see the value of a resource support teacher in principle, although they had not experienced it in practice.

Asked how the process for selecting the resource support teacher should be modified, several suggestions emerged: See the candidate in action; look for words like *energetic* or *doer* in the candidate's references; seek out someone who is knowledgeable about team building and curriculum integration. A Milwaukee Public Schools official also recommended that the job description itself be changed to place more emphasis on day-to-day involvement in classroom activities. Pulaski's principal expressed uncertainty whether the position of resource support teacher could be best filled by a building or a nonbuilding person, by someone assigned to it full time or only part time (while also carrying a partial teaching load). But he was sure about one thing: He would not fill the position the following year. As he explained, "I don't think I got value out of it, the teachers don't want it, and they think they can do it by themselves."

Other supports for teachers. Team meetings and interaction with the resource support teacher were envisioned as ongoing sources of professional development for the Project Transition teachers. In addition, several other avenues for improving their knowledge and skills were available to them. Some of these proved more fruitful than others.

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[28]In contrast, teachers had only positive things to say about a curriculum specialist from the Milwaukee Public Schools central office who worked with Pulaski math and science teachers and was praised for her good, *usable* ideas.

The faculty member at Alverno College who was designated as the learning resource partner's delegate to Pulaski, was familiar with the objectives of Project Transition and with techniques for inducing teachers to become more reflective about their work. However, because of competing commitments, she visited Pulaski relatively infrequently and at times when she was available rather than when teachers might derive the maximum benefit from her presence. (On a day that she observed teacher's classes, for instance, one teacher conducted individual student conferences, another led a drill to prepare students for a state test, and a third played host to an outside speaker — all atypical activities.) She also felt that the resource support teacher had generally been unsympathetic to her ideas and had not given her sufficient opportunity to explain them to the teachers. During the second year of the demonstration, she worked with only one of the three teams: She was never able to heal the breach that had arisen with members of the second team during the first summer institute, and the lead teacher of the third team acknowledged that he had not taken the initiative to call her during the second year of the demonstration. (He explained that he had instead sought advice from faculty members at the undergraduate institution from which he had graduated.)[29]

Although teachers did not make intensive use of the professional development possibilities contained in the program model, many did seek out other opportunities for enhancing their knowledge and skills. One teacher, for example, attended a workshop on portfolio assessment; another attended a national conference for teachers in her discipline as well as a lead-teacher training program funded by the National Science Foundation. One teacher was selected to spend several days at an ecological laboratory in Arizona, where he was the only high school teacher in a group of professional scientists.

V. Efforts to Create a Sense of Community, Caring, and Respect

Along with team projects (discussed in the next chapter), the teacher teams organized various events to build a feeling of belonging among their students — and to have fun. With several teachers involved in the planning, it was possible to hold team parties, for example. Thus, one team had a party to celebrate the beginning of the school year and to help students meet each other, and followed up with parties at Halloween and spring break.

Teacher-student clusters made it feasible to have a variety of field trips. Students went to such varied places as the Milwaukee County Zoo, the Career Center, and Old World Wisconsin (a "pioneer village" illustrating the cultures of the various ethnic groups that had shaped Wisconsin's past). One teacher probably spoke for a number of his colleagues in noting that the field trips had enabled him to get closer to students and had also given the students the chance to see him as a slightly different person outside the classroom.

Most teachers agreed that it was important that teachers try to ensure that their students learn to work well in a group, and some teachers used other activities to try to build a sense of

[29]The learning resource partner also acknowledged that her relationship with the resource support teacher was not an open or candid one; she commented that when she talked with him about his own experiences and activities, he seemed defensive and unresponsive to her suggestions.

attachment to classmates and to the school. For example, during a school food drive, one teacher stimulated a spirit of friendly competition among students in her homeroom, encouraging them to collect more food items than the other homerooms. She kept a running tabulation of her homeroom students' contributions and praised individual students for their contributions to the ever-increasing total.

Finally, teachers reported that they tried to create a supportive environment for students in their individual classrooms. On the survey, all but one teacher said that they made a conscious effort to show students that they cared about them. Eight of the 12 teachers agreed that it was important to spend class time talking about issues related to students' personal development, even if doing so came at the expense of covering subject matter. Two-thirds of the teachers also agreed that they should be accessible to students, even if it meant meeting with them before or after school or during a preparation or free period.

Students' focus-group comments indicate that their attitudes toward their teachers varied greatly. While each team had at least one teacher to whom most students could relate easily and whom they liked a great deal ("the best teacher I ever had," said one student), there were also teachers whom they disliked intensely and many about whom they had mixed feelings. Students liked the teachers who explained things well and clearly, who made their classes interesting and fun, and who explained things individually to students who were having difficulties. One student described a teacher whom he and his classmates respected and admired: "If he explains work and sometimes it's hard, he'll explain it to you again until you get it. Most teachers say, 'We explained it once and we're not going to explain it again.' They'll say, 'You should have been listening.'" Students also liked teachers who gave students the feeling that they would always make time for them and who made it clear that they understood the students' points of view ("She knows how teenagers are," and "She knows when something's wrong with you" were two comments about a favorite teacher).

In contrast, the students strongly disliked teachers who seemed to take sides and play favorites ("She treats the good students with respect; the bad ones she doesn't care about," was one critique); whose classes were boring ("I feel like a copy machine," a student complained); who did not take adequate time to explain things or correct students' mistakes; and who seemed to decide early on whether or not students were academically able and gave the students the same grades thereafter, no matter what their level of work. (Said one student about such a teacher, "I'll do just some of my work and get a C. Then I'll do all of my work and still get a C.") They were also wary of teachers who seemed to expect the students to have a bad attitude or who seemed to be waiting for students to act up.

Generally, then, students said that they felt the most respect for teachers who seemed to most respect them. And it was what teachers did in their instructional roles — how they communicated the material, whether they were fair, and whether they seemed to enjoy interacting with teenagers — that most influenced students' assessments.

VI. The Meaning of Project Transition at Pulaski High School

The impacts of Project Transition on students' attitudes and behavior are discussed at length in Chapter 6. The focus-group responses suggest that students experienced real benefits from their small-group clusters. Shared scheduling seems to have facilitated students' entry into a large and impersonal school setting, provided students with a ready set of classmates with whom to establish friendships, and made it easier for students to study together and to request help with their assignments from each other.

As far as the teachers were concerned, it seems fair to say that for most of the Project Transition teachers, the most meaningful element of the demonstration was the opportunity it offered teachers to break out of their isolation and join their colleagues in daily small-group team meetings. As one experienced teacher put it, the family, with its meetings, "really pulls you through a lot." Asked what was most enjoyable about the project, the teacher replied, "The opportunity to vent and share."

Although it is impossible to be certain on this point, the interview data strongly support the hypothesis that the existence of the family teams accounts at least in part for the generally high degree of job satisfaction most Project Transition teachers expressed.[30] Eight of the 12 teachers expressed strong agreement (responses of 5 or 6 on a 6-point scale) with the statement on the teacher survey, "Overall, I am satisfied with my job at least most of the time"; only one expressed a low agreement (a response of 1 or 2). Most teachers, too, agreed with the statement, "My job provides me with continuing professional stimulation and growth." Conversely, only two teachers strongly agreed with the assertion, "I think that the stresses and disappointments involved in teaching at this school aren't really worth it."

On the other hand, there is little evidence that a high degree of attachment to their family teams translated into feelings of attachment to other Project Transition components, to other project teachers, or to a broader vision of what the project should achieve. The teachers' opposition to shared scheduling, the resistance a number of them felt toward the resource support teacher, and their limited use of the assistance available to them from the learning resource partner have been discussed.[31] Further, teacher survey responses indicate that the feelings of solidarity that teachers felt with members of their family teams did not extend to the group of Project Transition teachers as a whole.

Teachers were asked the same set of questions with regard to members of their small-group teacher teams and the full Project Transition teacher complement. Pronounced differences in their responses were evident across the domains of knowing each other's teaching styles, sharing similar beliefs, working together, and seeking advice. Thus, most teachers indicated

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[30]Unfortunately, no baseline measures of teachers' job satisfaction were taken. Furthermore, the teacher questionnaire was not administered to other, nonproject, teachers at the school, so no comparisons of this kind can be made.

[31]In retrospect, at least, it seems ironic that the teachers could readily perceive the benefits, in terms of reduced isolation and an increased sense of belonging, that they experienced as members of a small group but did not acknowledge that students, through shared scheduling, might realize similar advantages.

some or considerable understanding of the instructional goals and practices of members of their family teams; but the majority also indicated that they knew little about the goals and practices of teachers who were not on their teams. With respect to their family teams, 10 of the 12 teachers expressed low agreement with the assertion, "We have very different ideas about what we should emphasize in the curriculum," whereas with regard to the full team, only 3 expressed similarly low agreement, and 4 said they did not know. Two-thirds of the teachers expressed low agreement with the statement, "Colleagues do not usually share instructional materials or activities they've developed" when this applied to their family team, but with respect to all project teachers, only one-quarter offered a similar response. Eleven of the 12 teachers strongly agreed with the assertion, "We often seek each other's advice about professional issues and problems" when the statement pertained to members of their small groups, but only two teachers indicated that seeking advice within the larger Project Transition group was common.

In summary, Project Transition appears to have created three discrete groups of teachers whose primary loyalty was to the other members of their group. This in itself marked great progress at a school where teachers had traditionally felt isolated from one another. But the project does not appear to have forged a community of 12 teachers with a shared identity. As a consequence, many Project Transition teachers were uncertain whether teachers who were not on their team shared their own beliefs about the central mission of the project — a finding that raises questions about the clarity with which the purposes of Project Transition were initially explained to the teachers and subsequently reinforced. In any event, it is unlikely that teachers viewed change in their own classroom practices as one of these purposes, a subject reprised in Chapter 5. If demonstration planners and Milwaukee Public Schools officials viewed Project Transition as a "back door" to educational reform, the implementation record at Pulaski suggests that the project indeed opened that door but not as wide as had been hoped, at least in the short term.

Chapter 3

Implementing the Project in Kansas City

I. Introduction

From the beginning, Schlagle High School in Kansas City, Kansas, had several advantages over Pulaski High School.

1. First, and perhaps most important, the demonstration phase of Project Transition at Schlagle took place during the 1996-97 academic year, a year later than at Pulaski. The later start enabled Schlagle to benefit from the lessons MDRC had learned in working in Milwaukee, including the importance of securing teachers' ownership of the program model and involving them in planning for its implementation.

2. The demonstration phase at Schlagle was preceded by a considerably longer planning period than Pulaski staff had enjoyed; this permitted the teachers to engage in additional training activities and meetings and to develop a better understanding of the model and its objectives.

3. Schlagle benefited from a strong learning resource partner called the Learning Exchange, a private educational resource organization based in Kansas City, Missouri. The Learning Exchange had worked successfully with other high schools in the Kansas City, Kansas, school district to implement teacher teams and professional development, and they were able to perform similar functions at Schlagle.

4. The Kauffman Foundation, based in Kansas City, Missouri, was instrumental in securing interest in the Project Transition proposal during the planning process due to its relationship with officials from the Kansas City, Kansas, school district. The Kansas City, Kansas, school district had worked with Kauffman on past reform projects, and this relationship strengthened the school district's support for Project Transition.

5. The person hired for the coach position proved to be adept at working both with groups and with individual teachers.

6. Finally, the assistant principal at Schlagle charged with oversight of Project Transition was strongly committed to the intervention and devoted a great deal of her time to making it work.

For all these reasons, Project Transition was implemented more fully in Kansas City than in Milwaukee, and all the project's components were in place and operating throughout the demonstration period. At the end of the demonstration period, Project Transition would continue as part of the school's organizational structure for an additional two years. The school successfully lobbied its district office for continuation of the project using district funds. School staff believed

that Project Transition complemented other reform efforts being implemented in the district and that its continuation would assist them in meeting their school improvement goals.

This chapter examines the progress of program implementation at Schlagle High School. The next section describes the school and its environment, the students, the staff, and the classroom environment during the year that Project Transition was implemented. Section III discusses the program planning period and preimplementation activities that took place from January 1995 through August 1996. Section IV considers the demonstration period (August 1996 through May 1997) and focuses on the ways that each component of the program model was utilized by students, teachers, and Project Transition leaders throughout the year.

The data from this chapter are based on site visits by MDRC staff during the planning and implementation years. During the implementation year, site visits by various staff members took place about once a month, including site visits by the qualitative researcher who made five visits between August 1996 and May 1997 (about every two months). Each qualitative research visit generally lasted about three days, during which individual interviews with staff members, student focus groups, classroom observations, and team-meeting observations were conducted.

II. The School and Its Students

A. The Building and Its Environment

Schlagle High School is a modern, well-maintained three-story building located in a fairly suburban area of Kansas City, Kansas. Positioned at the top of a hill and surrounded by grassy areas and parking lots for teachers and students, Schlagle faces an educational facility called the Area Vocational Technical School, which offers specialized courses for adults as well as high school-age students. The "educational park" is bounded by two thoroughfares dotted with private homes. A few small strip malls are within driving distance of the school. The neighborhood around Schlagle High School appears to be populated by both African Americans and whites, and some teachers of both races live near the school.

B. The Student Body

Schlagle's location and physical setting would seem to belie its status as an inner-city school. However, with its student population of over 1,000, Schlagle can easily be described as a large, comprehensive high school that has many characteristics of inner-city schools.

Almost three-quarters of Schlagle's students (72 percent in the 1996-97 academic year) are African American, while a minority are white (26 percent) or Hispanic (2 percent). Many students are bused in from poorer areas in Kansas City that, according to school personnel, have experienced a severe economic decline (unemployment, loss of businesses, falling real estate values) and increases in crime, gang violence,[1] and the illegal drug trade. About 50 percent of the

[1]According to Schlagle personnel, gang violence erupted in Kansas City in 1988, causing a period of extremely violent behavior among urban youth that lasted many years. The climate now is much calmer than it used to be, but school personnel are still greatly affected by fears of resurgent violence.

student body qualifies for a free or reduced-price lunch. In the 1994-95 school year, Schlagle's dropout rate of 18 percent was higher than the dropout rate for Kansas City, Kansas, high schools as a group (5 percent), further confirming the appropriateness of characterizing it as an inner-city school. (Inner-city schools nationwide usually report higher dropout rates than the average within their school districts.) The number of students enrolled also tends to drop more sharply between the 9th and 10th grades than at subsequent points, although many 9th graders who leave school are too young to be formally classified as dropouts. (Students are technically barred from leaving school until they turn 16 years old.) Thus, in the 1994-95 academic year, Schlagle's population numbered 339 9th graders, 256 10th graders, 218 11th graders, and 181 12th graders.

Seven middle schools serve as feeder schools for Schlagle, although about half the students come from just two of these.

C. School Atmosphere

Schlagle's school day begins at 7:25 A.M. and ends at 2:15 P.M. There is no homeroom period, and students start their day with "first hour." Students disembark from yellow school buses and enter the building through the two front entrances. There are no metal detectors; a couple of security guards with walkie-talkies keep an eye on the students. For the most part, students seem relaxed and friendly as they walk through bright hallways to their classrooms.

A large and well-appointed administrative office area is located on the first floor between the two main entrances. A low wall with a counter separates the student and visitor area from the secretarial area. Along a hallway to the right of the secretarial area are the offices of the principal, assistant principals, guidance counselors, and other staff and a conference room that became official venue for the daily Project Transition teacher team meetings. Having an official meeting room legitimized the activities of the teams, helped to contribute to team identity, and created a pleasant work space. It also allowed teams to store materials and information in one location; permitted bulletin boards, announcements, and inspirational art work and posters to be displayed; and enabled teams to conduct parent-student conferences in a comfortable environment near the administrative offices and counseling staff.

D. Project Transition Staff

At Schlagle, as at Pulaski, there were three Project Transition teams of four teachers, each of whom taught one of four core classes: English, math, world geography, and physical science. The 12 Project Transition teachers were evenly split by gender, with two male and two female teachers on each team. Nine of the 12 teachers were white, two were African American, and one was Euro-Asian. Most teachers came from the Kansas City area; the majority had at least three years of teaching experience.

In discussions during the planning period, teachers and administrators designed a modification of the Project Transition model to enable them to deal with special education students more effectively: Most of the incoming special education students who were mainstreamed in regular 9th-grade classes were assigned to one of the three teacher teams, and the resource

teacher for these special education students was also added to that team as its fifth member.[2] The resource teacher was expected to attend all team meetings and to act as an academic liaison between the team teachers and their special education students. He also worked closely with the mainstreamed students in a separate period at the end of the school day. His responsibilities included helping students organize their homework assignments, troubleshooting areas of academic weakness, keeping track of students' medications and their possible effects on performance, and providing teachers with information on areas in which the students were having problems so that the teachers could work more effectively with them.[3]

The person hired as the Project Transition coach was new to Schlagle. An African American woman with 28 years of teaching experience and seven years of supervisory experience working with teacher teams in middle schools, her role was to provide support, technical assistance, and training to teachers in the three teams.

The principal of Schlagle High School was an African American man who was very new to Schlagle when the faculty voted to adopt Project Transition. In general, Project Transition teachers perceived the principal as congenial but often complained that he was weak in enforcing discipline throughout the school. From the outset and through his tenure at Schlagle, the principal was supportive of Project Transition and optimistic about its potential to succeed. At the same time, the principal delegated all administrative matters concerning the project to one of the school's three assistant principals.

As noted earlier, this assistant principal was a driving force behind the project. After five years as a math teacher at Schlagle, she had been promoted to an administrative position some eight years before planning for Project Transition began, serving as an assistant principal for six of those years. Throughout both the planning year and the demonstration phase, she displayed a strong interest in the project's operations, often attending team meetings, observing classrooms and offering suggestions, promoting project activities, and assisting with the supervision of the 9th graders during their lunch period. She also met frequently with the coach and the Learning Exchange representative to plan for professional development activities, such as staff retreats, and generally to help ensure that the project ran smoothly.

E. Classrooms During Implementation: Meeting Challenges and Changing Expectations

Various MDRC staff members had opportunities to visit Project Transition classrooms and to make general assessments on the quality of teaching and learning that was taking place over the course of the year. These observations, along with observations of team meetings and individual interviews with staff members, revealed that teaching and learning were heavily influenced by Project Transition staff members' ideas and goals. Project Transition teachers were

[2]The majority of the special education students entering 9th grade were mainstreamed. A small number of students were not permitted to be by stipulation of their individualized education plans, which schools must adhere to according to state and federal laws.

[3]Project Transition did not retain its special education resource teacher position after the end of its demonstration year. In the following two years of Project Transition's continuation, teachers would say that this component of the program was vital for improving the performance of their mainstreamed special education students.

motivated by the idea that they could increase student achievement by creating a more supportive environment in which students could learn. For many Project Transition teachers, a more supportive environment was interpreted as a positive change in behavior among students entering the 9th grade.

Project Transition teachers sought solutions that could address student behavior and began to take action. At the beginning of the school year, Project Transition teachers were focused on two objectives: establishing control of their classrooms and creating a respectful social climate in Project Transition's 9th grade. Based on their experiences with 9th graders in previous years, gaining control was their first priority. One teacher explained, "Most teachers think it [Project Transition] is a way to bring discipline to the school."

Many teachers' perceptions of students were based on events that had occurred in previous years at the school. Teachers described Schlagle's former 9th graders as disruptive students who created disciplinary nightmares. One particular act of vandalism, which was said to have occurred at Schlagle frequently, was the setting of fires in students' lockers. Gang activity had also been a problem in Schlagle's past.

An assumption shared by many teachers was that Project Transition would enable them to establish control more easily and thereby allow the creation of an academic environment that would permit student learning. The following teacher comments during interviews at the beginning of the year are revealing:

> Students will behave better and have more successful outcomes. The teams will be working together to help students develop better social skills. . . . This should affect students' behavior in positive ways.
>
> I expect the students' patterns of behavior to improve in the classroom. A classroom needs order. Teachers lose too much time and energy maintaining discipline. The consistency of the team approach should benefit kids.
>
> Students' social skills with their own classmates should improve. This will result in students becoming more comfortable in the classroom.
>
> When there is a discipline problem, having four teachers work on a student instead of one is an advantage. Students may show a change of attitude. . . . We want to change their norms into our norms.
>
> I hope more students will develop more trust in their classmates. . . . Anyway, it can't get any worse than it already is.

Contrary to the teachers' primary emphasis on student behavior, the Project Transition leadership (the coach, assistant principal and Learning Exchange representative) was more concerned with the teachers' ability to engage student interest and create excitement about learning itself. The Project Transition leadership believed that if classrooms became more engaging, student misbehavior would decrease, because students would be actively involved in their learning experiences. In short, the Project Transition leadership believed that ineffective teaching led to student boredom and ultimately, student misbehavior.

The Project Transition leadership worked tirelessly to deliver the message to teachers that classroom practice had to be improved, that students needed to become more interested and engaged in the academic content they were presented with. Looking back at the end of the year, the assistant principal said, "There was a lot of room for improvement in individual classrooms as we began this demonstration. Much of the style among the teachers was very traditional."

Responding to this mandate to improve teaching practice, and feeling that improvements in student behavior were necessary for effective teaching, teachers worked hard to meet both sets of demands. However, teachers also experienced a great deal of stress and often did not know if what they were attempting was truly effective. Teachers varied in their response to these competing demands according to their skills, confidence levels, and beliefs about students. The result was that their beliefs and behaviors had a strong influence on their classroom environments.

Teachers who had higher expectations of students often took care to reinforce these expectations with verbal encouragement. At the same time, they introduced higher-level curricular materials than what generally had been used in the past.

Observation 1. The teacher began by leading a discussion about Chapter 5 in *Animal Farm*, which had been assigned for homework. The teacher's mode of questioning students was to ask, "What happened?" and "What did these events mean?" Of the 21 students in the class, six students volunteered many of the responses to her questions and offered their own interpretation of the events in the chapter. The discussion centered on power and corruption among leaders, and the teacher used the story to make frequent comparisons with power and corruption among leaders in real-world events. Although the class followed a traditional lecture format, the discussion was lively, and most students were attentive and focused. One student commented that the class was surprised to find out how interesting the book was after they started reading it. The teacher responded, "This book is a hard book to read, but you guys are handling it very well. I know some people in this school didn't think that 9th graders could handle it, and they thought I was crazy to assign this to you, but I knew you would be able to handle it if you were just given a chance."

Some teachers who doubted the students' abilities to engage in higher-level work still attempted to make classes interesting by using new techniques, such as cooperative learning strategies. However, their doubts about the students' abilities were sometimes revealed through their communication with students, as the following example illustrates.

Observation 2. During a Tech Math class, the teacher began the period by announcing that he would give extra credit to any team (composed of 3 or 4 students sitting together) who solved a math puzzle. The teacher said that he was looking for teamwork and expected everyone at each table to be able to explain how the problem was solved. Using an overhead projector, the teacher displayed a page with nine large dots (positioned evenly across 3 columns and 3 rows). The teacher instructed the students to "connect dots using lines that don't intersect with each

other." He added, "I know you can do this. This is only a 4th-grade-level problem, and you should be able to handle this."[4]

Often, teachers tried hard to be more innovative with the use of new methods, such as the incorporation of new technology or individualized learning. However, teaching in unfamiliar ways may have led some teachers to experience new stresses. This stress affected teachers in different ways, causing some to sabotage their own efforts with students due to their tone of communication.

Observation 3. Students sat in a large room with computers lined up against all four walls. Most students sat at their own workstation, but a few students shared one computer. The students' task was to conduct a search on the Internet to find various maps and geographic or demographic information about the Kansas City, Kansas, area. Most students worked at their computers with concentrated effort, but only five of the 23 students successfully located maps of Kansas City. Students called on the teacher to help them when they got stuck (as most did). The teacher, a paraprofessional, and a technician assisted students at their computers but were making slow progress around the room because they were working with most students individually. By the end of the period, they had not been able to reach several students who needed help. Some students chatted with their classmates as they waited for assistance. Although individual conversations were not loud, when the teacher felt the class was getting too loud, she announced, "Volume!" and students immediately lowered their voices or stopped talking. One female student was ahead of most of the other students, because she had already located the maps she needed and was in the process of writing up her description. She walked up to the teacher, who was sitting with a couple of students, and asked her to listen to what she had written. At first the teacher agreed, and the girl began to read aloud a sentence from a full page of handwriting. The teacher asked to read it herself and took the notebook from the girl's hand. After a few seconds the teacher handed the notebook back and said, "I'll read this when it's time to be handed in, because if I read it all now, then I'll be bored when I have to read it again when it comes time to mark it." The girl answered, "Okay" and walked back to her computer slowly, with a look of dejection on her face.

Teachers who had high expectations of their students, who were confident of their ability to establish strong respectful relationships with their students, and who were confident of their own teaching ability were in the best position to implement more innovation in their classrooms. These teachers were less likely to experience the stress of meeting the multiple demands of innovating more effectively, communicating more effectively, and maintaining control. There were a number of teachers who exhibited these abilities consistently throughout the year, while others became more skillful as the year progressed.

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[4]Part of this math teacher's difficulty may have stemmed from the added burden of having to implement a new curriculum called the Tech Prep Program, which was mandated by the Kansas City, Kansas, school district. Math teachers found this implementation difficult because they never received textbooks or training to support their efforts. Math teachers had to rely on their old materials and past experiences with students who had difficulty with math. This was due to the fact that students with poor math skills were being tracked into tech math classes, making it even more difficult for teachers to decide what they should be teaching.

Observation 4. A science teacher began his class with students seated at their desks in order to listen to instructions for the period's activity. The teacher gave clear instructions for analyzing soil samples and the ransom letter.[5] While describing what he expected the students to do in the laboratory, he used vocabulary terms such as *protocol,* which he defined as "what's supposed to be done," and *quality control,* which he defined as "working carefully to get good results, otherwise the wrong person might get convicted." The teacher described the procedure, gave the sequence that the activity should follow, explained the purpose of the procedure, and explained how the data they found would be incorporated into their final papers. As soon as he finished talking, students got up and went to the work area where the laboratory tables were. Students worked quickly and efficiently. They set up their test tubes, measured chemical solutions with droppers, and carefully dropped samples of soil into the test tubes. They recorded their findings for PH levels, phosphorus, nitrogen, and potassium into notebooks, which they were to transfer onto the computer during a subsequent class. Students talked quietly among themselves and seemed both relaxed and focused. The teacher walked around amiably and joked with some students as he checked their progress. Near the end of class, students cleaned up their areas and cooperated with each other as they put materials away. All 26 students were fully engaged for the entire period.

In summary, Project Transition classrooms at Schlagle can be characterized as having a great deal of variation among the teachers in terms of their ability to meet multiple new demands. New demands from the Project Transition leadership included expectations for innovations in classroom practice as well as expectations that teachers would interact with students more positively and personably. Teacher-driven goals centered on improving the learning environment by improving the behavior of Project Transition students.[6]

Over time, increases in teachers' abilities to meet these demands led to noticeable improvements in classroom management, teacher-student communication, lesson planning, and the creative development of content areas. By the end of the school year, many Project Transition staff members said that it was important to them to continue working to improve their instructional practices over the course of the next school year. Many Project Transition staff members also believed that they could have a more powerful effect on student learning.

The following sections describe the series of events and the structural components that enabled Project Transition teachers to develop the practices and attitudes they manifested in their classrooms as the program was implemented.

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[5]The students' task was to identify a suspect for an interdisciplinary unit on criminology, and the samples and letter were evidence.

[6]Teachers later said that their need to focus on student behavior diminished greatly during Project Transition's second and third years of operation. Teachers said that, overall, the school's climate improved dramatically as a result of the efforts of a new building principal, who expected all students to follow new rules of behavior.

III. Preimplementation Activities During the Planning Year in Kansas City

A. Becoming Partners and Committing to Project Transition

In the winter of 1994, MDRC began discussions with the Kauffman Foundation and the Kansas City, Kansas, school district about implementing Project Transition in a Kansas City high school. Kansas City, Kansas, appeared to be more promising than other cities under consideration at that time because of strong support for the concept of Project Transition from top school district officials, who had seen the successful results of previous experiments with student clustering in two other high schools in the school district. The officials deemed Schlagle High School an appropriate site for the intervention both because of its history of low achievement, high dropout rates, and high course failure rates among 9th graders and because administrators and staff had responded warmly to the Project Transition model and the concept underlying it as presented by MDRC staff.[7] The Learning Exchange, which provided technical assistance around teacher-centered professional development activities at the other two high schools, was considered an attractive local resource to work with staff at Schlagle as well.

A final decision to fund the project could not be reached until April 1995. However, as early as January 1995, school district officials, Schlagle administrators, and MDRC agreed (pending funding decisions) to use the 1995-96 school year as a planning year for consensus building, technical assistance, and staff development at Schlagle and to begin actual implementation in the 1996-97 school year.

During a pivotal visit to Schlagle High School in May 1995, MDRC staff again emphasized the need for school district administrators and Schlagle staff to become involved and invested in developing Project Transition. Schlagle's assistant principal expressed her desire that teachers drive the intervention at an open meeting attended by various staff members, and she was strongly supportive of activities that could help this goal to be realized. Teachers responded favorably and offered a number of comments, including the idea that Project Transition was a project designed to help teachers help students. Schlagle teachers asked to exchange information and ideas with teachers from the district high school that had successfully implemented a similar project, an indication that they were starting to think ahead about the practical issues of implementing Project Transition.

B. Initial Facilitation and Technical Assistance from MDRC Staff

In October 1995, near the beginning of the formal Project Transition planning year, MDRC staff met with the various parties (including Schlagle, the Learning Exchange, the Kauffman Foundation, and the school district). A major change had occurred at Schlagle a few months earlier with the arrival of a new principal. The new principal was eager for rapid change

[7]The four other high schools in the district were judged inappropriate for the demonstration for various reasons. As noted earlier, two had had previous experiences with student clustering, a third school admitted only high-achieving and gifted students, and a fourth was deemed inhospitable to the intervention because of the lukewarm response of its principal.

at Schlagle and believed that strong top-down leadership was necessary to implement Project Transition. The views of the assistant principal, on the other hand, were more aligned with MDRC's goal of creating a teacher-driven initiative: She believed that the faculty would become attached to the program if they had input into its design.

At a staff meeting attended by some 40 teachers, MDRC staff explained to the teachers that their participation in Project Transition was important, noting that ultimately, the project would not work well unless the teachers developed it themselves. By the end of the meeting and workshops with teachers, about one-quarter of Schlagle's faculty members (16 teachers) signed up to participate on a committee to help implement Project Transition at Schlagle. The assistant principal became the lead contact person for the planning committee.

Beginning the next month, an MDRC staff member worked intensively to supply technical and operational assistance at Schlagle. One of her major objectives was to institute a planning process that would allow teachers and administrators to take ownership of the initiative, tailor it to fit the school's particular needs, and map out detailed ideas for implementing Project Transition at Schlagle. According to the assistant principal, the staff at Schlagle was surprised by this approach. Both teachers and administrators had expected that as in previous reform efforts, they would be told what to do and how to do it. As the assistant principal put it, "It's easy to implement a canned program, but it was exciting, scary, and a lot more work for us to think about how we wanted to implement the model ourselves . . . we were dumbfounded." However, with the encouragement of the MDRC staff person, the planning committee at Schlagle worked hard to implement this new approach.

C. Staff Involvement in the Planning of Project Transition

By January 1996, the planning committee was engaged in a number of efforts. One work group was formed to investigate how other schools had scheduled clusters of students and formed teacher teams. A guidance counselor took the lead on this task.

A second committee's concern was to develop support for Project Transition among the rest of the faculty and to keep them informed about the initiative both through one-to-one conversations with colleagues and through formally scheduled staff meetings. Committee members made a presentation about the Project Transition model at a December faculty meeting and again emphasized that their goal was to adapt the model to Schlagle's particular needs and circumstances.[8] The committee then asked the entire faculty to vote on adopting the Project Transition program, and by a show of hands, the faculty voted unanimously to do so, provided that the model was developed to meet the school's needs. At the end of the meeting, committee members distributed a survey to ascertain teachers' interest in participating in Project Transition. Twenty teachers replied that they were interested.

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[8]In building support for the project, it was especially important to the planning committee to emphasize their independence from the school district and to portray Project Transition as a school-based initiative rather than one brought in at the district's behest. According to a couple of teachers, many teachers had negative perceptions of interventions that the district had introduced in the past. As one teacher expressed it, over the years, he had seen the district make too many changes that had often had demoralizing effects on teachers.

A potential conflict was deflected when, during the same meeting, it became apparent that the new school principal wanted, then and there, to name the teachers who would be on the Project Transition teams, to appoint team leaders, and to choose the coach. MDRC staff attending the meeting successfully argued that a process that included the entire faculty was needed for selecting teachers and the coach, a position supported by a representative from the school district central office who was present at the meeting.

D. Moving Forward: Recruiting Project Transition Staff

While the planning committee made a number of important decisions about operationalizing the Project Transition model (i.e., mainstreaming special education students into one team and hiring a support teacher who would work with them), teachers were less sure of making staffing decisions from among their own ranks. Consequently, they asked the assistant principal and principal to take the lead on this task. Using the survey that had earlier been distributed to the teachers, the assistant principal and principal held a follow-up meeting with those teachers who had expressed interest in joining the project. By mid-March, three teachers from the planning committee had been chosen to be informal leaders of the three Project Transition teams. The rationale was that these teachers would be in a good position to communicate to their teammates what they had formulated during the planning year. The assistant principal and principal then chose the other teachers based on the teachers' interest, characteristics, and experience with the core subjects.

Discussions with the representative from the Learning Exchange helped MDRC and Schlagle administrators identify and agree on characteristics needed in a coach for Project Transition at Schlagle. Teachers also weighed in on the qualities they wanted the coach to possess, and they selected a committee to draft a job description for the position for review by the larger group. The job announcement describing the coach position was posted in the school district, and four candidates, all seasoned teachers, applied and were interviewed for the job. The two finalists were observed in their classrooms by the assistant principal and the Learning Exchange representative and subsequently interviewed by the Project Transition teachers. The person selected as coach was an African American woman with many years experience teaching in the school district and proven abilities as a team facilitator in middle school settings.

E. Summer Training Institute

Planning for a summer institute, to be held at the Learning Exchange immediately after the end of the school year and to focus on training and team-building for Project Transition teachers, began several months before the fact (and, indeed, before the project's teachers had even been selected). A subcommittee from the Project Transition planning committee at Schlagle compiled a list of topics they hoped to cover at the summer institute, including team structure, planning, and meeting guidelines; cross-curriculum teaching strategies; interpersonal communication skills with students and colleagues; discipline; development of a career component for 9th graders; assessment tests; and student action plans. The length of the list suggested that a high level of initiative toward, and engagement with, Project Transition was emerging among the planning committee members.

From June 3 to June 6, 1996, all the teachers who had been recruited for Project Transition, the assistant principal, coach, Learning Exchange representative, several staff members from MDRC, and trainers and consultants recruited through the Learning Exchange came together for four days of training, team-building activities, and professional development. Teacher engagement in this training was produced, in part, through team-building activities that enabled the three Project Transition teams to begin collaborating together and challenging each other on real issues, such as the creation of interdisciplinary curriculums. The teachers discussed and modeled such topics as how they would work together in the coming year, how they could become more sensitive to issues of diversity, and how they could create challenging, more engaging classrooms using integrated curricula.[9]

The teachers at the summer institute had a great deal of assistance from the facilitators who were brought in, but the facilitators were also skillful at enabling the Project Transition teachers to gradually take on more of their own role. By the end of the week, one observer noted that the facilitators, although present, were no longer needed, because the teachers and other staff from the school were communicating with each other on a new level. Teachers also seemed to be more conscious of the message of one presenter, an African American professor who encouraged teachers to have high expectations of all their students, especially students of color from low-income families. The assistant principal and the Learning Exchange representative indicated that they were quite pleased with the progress the teachers had made and with the level of commitment and promise that they saw developing in the teacher teams.

An additional day of training took place just before the start of the new school year. During the training, the teacher teams reached final agreements on their team work plans and structures; they also created mission statements, began work on student action plans, and developed protocols for interacting with building administrators and counselors. The role of the coach, and how she would be interacting with the teacher teams, was also clarified.

IV. The Demonstration Period

A. Issues of Early Implementation

One issue confronting the school during the first week of implementation was the unexpectedly large student enrollment for the incoming 9th-grade class. In the planning year, only three Project Transition teacher teams had been created, because the school had expected to enroll 320 new freshmen; instead, it enrolled over 400. This created a great deal of pressure on the Project Transition teachers, who believed that their class sizes were becoming unacceptably large and that their ability to be effective with students would be impaired.

[9]The summer institute also proved to be an opportunity for weeding out inappropriate choices among the faculty. During the activities, it became apparent that one teacher was not cooperating. Schlagle and MDRC staff decided to remove this teacher from the remainder of the institute's activities and from participating in Project Transition. Once the school year began, another staff member was chosen to fulfill his role on Project Transition.

Schlagle administrators responded by making an official request to the school district for additional staff support for Project Transition. By October, the district authorized the hiring of three paraprofessionals (one for each team), who proved to be very helpful to the teacher teams through their work in classrooms and with students. The willingness of the district to supply extra funds alleviated teachers' fears that the district would not be supportive of their efforts during the demonstration.

B. Elements of the Program Model

As a result of decisions made in the planning year, the training that took place at the summer institute, and the close involvement of the assistant principal, all elements of the Project Transition model were in place at the beginning of the implementation period. Students were assigned to one of three teams, they shared many of their core-subject classes with members of this team, the teacher teams met daily during a common planning period, the coach provided both individual help and team support to Project Transition teachers, and professional development activities for teachers were organized.

Shared scheduling. On the opening of school, virtually all students had been placed into teams with subject classes clustered appropriately. Students reported experiencing structure and orderliness during the first week of school because of the earlier preparation and information that they had received about Project Transition and their classes from an orientation meeting. Ninth graders observed during the first week appeared confident and generally at ease with one another; they later reported that it had taken them relatively little time — between three days and two weeks — to become fully adjusted to their peers, teachers, and schedules.[10]

By October most students were complaining to their teachers and to the researcher that they were tired of seeing the same students all the time, they felt they were being treated like babies, and they were ready to expand their friendships by meeting not only 9th graders on other teams but also upperclassmen (a special interest of many of the girls).[11] Students said that being forced to stay with the same students every day made school less comfortable because gossip and rumors circulated faster and farther within their peer networks. They cited a lack of trust in general and, in particular, rivalries and gossip about boy-girl relationships that occasionally led to fights. One boy participating in a focus group held in October commented, "Yeah, I made a lot of new friends. But most of them are, kinda like, enemies right now." Strong opinions such as these surfaced early in the year; later site visits revealed that students had accepted shared schedules as part of their routine, and had learned how to work out their differences with peers in order to maintain a more peaceful environment.

In contrast to their students, most Project Transition teachers were supportive of having students share schedules (sometimes referred to as "traveling together") and viewed it positively, as the following comments drawn from interviews early in the school year indicate:

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[10]Both teachers and students helped new students and transfers who entered the school after the first week to become absorbed into the mainstream.

[11]The students' complaints about isolation within Project Transition stemmed in part from the fact that they had a separate lunch period that excluded them from contact with students in the upper grades.

> For teachers, it's good. It makes it easier to keep track of students. For students, the advantages are that they can become familiar with a group, and this makes it easier for them to get to know each other. Its easier for a community of learning. The negative is that the students don't get to know more kids in school. This may help them educationally. We're not here for socializing.
>
> It's working out. There are no problems in the hallways. As the year goes on, we'll see what happens.
>
> At this point, I don't see any negative outcomes stemming from student traveling together. Right now, it seems that traveling together is cutting down on the number of tardies [students arriving late] to my classes.
>
> The students are okay. They're just regular teenagers, and most teachers forget that. For a lot of kids with home and work responsibilities, school is often the only place where students can be kids. Traveling together will be good for students, because it can decrease their stress and give them a chance to just be kids.

As these comments suggest, most teachers were not worried that students would become rowdier in the hallways as a result of shared scheduling. In fact, teachers who had been at the school for a few years believed that incidents of hallway misconduct at the beginning of the school year had decreased in frequency and intensity among the Project Transition freshmen compared to 9th graders in previous years.

> Compared to how we did things in previous years, I think this is the greatest thing that has been done at Schlagle in a long time. Previously, students would get out of hand. Because of the team approach, I can see the difference in students already.
>
> After seeing how students behaved after the first few days of school, I'm starting to believe that grouping students into clusters is going to work. Students seem more relaxed and less likely to get into trouble.

The teachers' positive responses may partly reflect the fact that the component was implemented in a way that allowed teachers to feel more in control of their environment. Project Transition students had a different bell schedule than upperclassmen and therefore, between many of their classes, were the only students in the hallways. Project Transition classrooms were also grouped in close proximity to one another so that students did not have to walk long distances between classes. The teachers stood outside their classroom doors in the hallways when students changed classes so they could watch the students coming through the halls and greet them as they entered their classrooms. The 9th graders' comments that they were "treated like babies" may have stemmed in part from their observation that freshmen were monitored more closely than students in any other grade.

By the end of the year, a few Project Transition teachers, sensitive to students' feelings of boredom with their peers, expressed the belief that this component of the program might not be necessary. These teachers suggested that the 9th graders' isolation from the upper grades was

contributing to their tendency to act immaturely and that upperclassmen could serve as role models for more mature behavior. And, as one teacher noted, "Kids don't seem to like it. They want to be around older kids and see their relatives in the upper grades. They say it's kind of boring being with the same people all day long." Most teachers agreed, however, that students' behavior improved as the year progressed, and students adjusted well to shared scheduling, despite their complaints. In addition, the Project Transition leadership believed that this aspect of the program was necessary for the students, even though students may not have understood all the benefits.

Teachers' expectations. At the beginning of the year, teachers' expectations about teaming, coaching, and professional development with the Learning Exchange were generally positive. All the teachers said that they expected their team experience to be a source of greater personal satisfaction and of professional growth. Teachers expected to collaborate with and learn from others in an unthreatening environment, to support each other when problems arose, to develop better communication with their teammates, and to work together to achieve common goals. The following comments are typical:

> I want to be able to learn from others. I hope that being on a team can remove some of the isolation that teachers feel. I want to be an active member of the team . . . become more flexible. Teachers can get set in their ways after so many years. I don't want that to happen to me.

> I hope to gain knowledge of how to work with other educators. In graduate school, they talk about cross-curriculum teaching. Normally, its hard to find time to plan and do that. This [teaming] will force me to learn how to do that.

> I would like to experience a greater sense of accomplishment. I want to be able to see more of the positives in the school and among the students. Being involved in the team will help me experience more positive energy.

> I'm going to give it my all. There were a lot of complaints last year about how disruptive the 9th grade was. The administration took a step in the right direction by taking on Project Transition. To do nothing [on my part] is to be part of the problem. Here's a program to help students. The administration did something. Let's try [as teachers] to make it work.

Teachers expected that the coach would work with them, both individually as teachers and collectively as members of teams, in order to ensure that they successfully implemented the project. Most said that it would be helpful for the coach and the Learning Exchange representative to observe their classes, give them constructive feedback and guidance, keep them on track with their classroom goals, and provide emotional support. As two teachers put it:

> I expect the coach to help me become a better teacher by answering my questions and offering solutions, by observing what I do in my class and offering constructive feedback.

> I expect the coach to give advice and support . . . to help lift me up when the going gets tough. The coach should help the team refocus whenever the team gets off track.

Teachers also expected the coach to help facilitate the team meetings and to promote their professional development by arranging such activities as guest speakers and visits to other high schools, and by bringing in new materials. At the same time, teachers were concerned about real issues that could arise as members of teams, as the following comments indicate:

> Teaming will help teachers get some support. Working on a team isn't easy, especially with professionals. Egos can get in the way. Getting past that is good. Teaming won't be a problem . . . everyone respects one another's opinions.

> I'm concerned that we stay on task and go about our business [of teaching]. At the middle school [where the teacher had had experience with teacher teams], their was no supervision of the teams. I'm glad that MDRC is involved. We get a unique opportunity by having a coach, money for activities, and technical support. I feel the pressure, but that's good. Positive pressure makes you perform better.

Teacher behaviors. The expectations, as documented in the previous section, appeared to motivate teachers to engage in behaviors that strengthened their ability to work together and solve problems as the year progressed. These behaviors included participation in daily team meetings, efforts to cooperate with team members, and efforts to follow through on creative projects and professional development activities.

During the daily team meetings, all teachers engaged in discussions about a variety of issues, such as the formulation of team goals, creation of new behavioral and academic expectations, coordination of new policies and activities, assessment of professional development needs, and evaluations of how well or poorly plans were proceeding so that adjustments could be made. Regarding this last point, some teachers tended to focus on how poorly events were proceeding in their classrooms or with individual students, and at times, discussions among teachers became intense. As time went on, teachers had to learn how to share information, respect diverse opinions, and work as a team. For many, teaming became an intensive learning process that challenged teachers to move beyond traditional roles and methods of teaching.

This learning process was facilitated by other elements of the Project Transition model, namely, coaching and professional development. Because the three teams had their meetings scheduled at separate times during the school day, the coach was able to attend all three team meetings daily. In addition, the assistant principal was able to attend meetings and assist the coach in her role as facilitator. Their steady presence helped to keep the teams on track, which enabled the teams to make progress toward their goals.

In addition, the three teams engaged in consistent professional development activities, starting with their attendance at a weekly full-group teacher team meeting held after school on Wednesdays. During these meetings, the three teams came together to share ideas and to partici-

pate in workshops that were facilitated by the Learning Exchange representative with support from the coach and the assistant principal.

To summarize, teachers' strong positive expectations about Project Transition at the beginning of the year led them to fully engage in the teaming experience despite some difficulties in learning to work as part of a team. Detailed information presented in Chapter 4 describes teachers' activities, concerns, accomplishments, and problem-solving strategies. Teachers' teaming experiences were also enhanced by the strong oversight of the coach, assistant principal, and Learning Exchange representative, as the next section documents.

The roles of the coach, assistant principal, and Learning Exchange representative. The activities of the coach at Schlagle entailed facilitating team meetings, visiting classrooms, planning professional development activities with the Learning Exchange representative, and meeting with administrative staff. The role of the coach was enthusiastically accepted by all parties, including, eventually, the students. From the outset and throughout the year, teachers welcomed the coach into their classrooms, accepted her presence during their daily team meetings as a given, and were receptive to her input and ideas. Even when individual teachers had differences of opinion with the coach (e.g., about the merits of cooperative learning in the classroom) or believed that she was being too hard on them, they continued to respect and maintain close communication with her. Although some teachers were more enthusiastic than others, virtually all teachers indicated that the coach fulfilled a useful purpose in Project Transition, served as a source of support, and helped them to develop as teachers.

The coach's style of communication generally conveyed a positive attitude toward teachers and reinforced the belief that she had high expectations of them. Even when dealing with teachers who needed to improve in many areas (such as learning to work with team members, changing their tone of communication with students, or becoming more creative in their classrooms), the coach skillfully delivered constructive criticism that did not alienate most teachers (although a few felt that the coach did not always see how hard teachers were working).

The coach was also concerned about teachers' interactions with students, their families, and their communities. She was quick to remind teachers that their mission was to serve students and the community to the best of their ability, no matter what social problems presented themselves. In her view, diversity training and sensitivity training were aspects of professional development that were critical for achieving that mission because, as she put it, "Lack of exposure among teachers [who are primarily white] at Schlagle predisposes them to not understanding things [among kids of color]." As she explained further, "Some non-Project Transition teachers are so bitter about the school, the kids, or the system that they are unsupportive [of innovations] or hostile, and there is an attitude problem with some of the white teachers. They don't understand minority kids, and they are not motivated to understand them. . . . Educators should not avoid talking about race." The coach told the interviewer, "I most admire teachers who truly care about kids as people . . . teachers who care about kids' academic progress . . . and teachers who care about the community that kids live in. I admire teachers who care about kids' future possibilities and who are dedicated to raising their future options."

The coach believed that Project Transition had affected the participating teachers in positive ways and that many of them were developing the qualities she valued, in part because the teams had enabled the teachers to talk openly and honestly about the students and their situations.

In addition to her other responsibilities, the coach helped to supervise the 9th-grade lunch period daily. This activity provided an opportunity for her to get to know many of the students on a first-name basis and for them to get to know her. The coach enjoyed this, and believed she developed a good rapport with the students, adding that she had carved out a niche for herself by informally advising students. Later in the school year, the coach became a sponsor for the newly reinstated Freshman Class Council, which had been inactive for a number of years.

The coach's role was heavily supported by the assistant principal, who had been closely connected to Project Transition during its planning year. The assistant principal often co-facilitated team meetings with the coach, especially at the beginning of the school year, and the two often collaborated in discussing the progress of individual teachers, planning professional development activities, and tackling daily activities and problems that needed to be addressed (e.g., scheduling, class size, new transfers) in order to make sure that Project Transition did not hit any major operational snags. The assistant principal had a friendly working relationship with teachers and commanded their cooperation and respect. Through her own behavior, which always displayed strong support for the coach, she was able to convey to the Project Transition teachers that they were to respect the role of the coach as much as they respected her own.

During the second half of the school year, the assistant principal became acting principal of the school. In addition to fulfilling her duties as assistant principal and staying involved in the daily operation of Project Transition, the assistant principal became fully involved in the administrative duties of the principal's office. Despite this surge of demands on her time, the assistant principal still chose to maintain close contact with the Project Transition program. At the same time, the coach had to develop a more independent role in the operation of the program. The assistant principal noted that the change had been handled successfully and expressed her appreciation of the coach's performance, saying:

> The role of the coach is to teach, support, and stretch the teachers. [Name] did a good job this year. She was in classrooms, was there to listen to and help teachers with student problems. This is a position that can make all the difference in the world with the project. Next year, I see [name] being more involved in demonstrating and modeling good practices. I would like her to move more to a role of guiding teachers to improve instruction. . . . She has successfully developed relationships with people. Now she is ready to move to the next level.

Before his departure, the principal of Schlagle High School displayed a general interest in the activities of Project Transition but did not interfere in the decisions or activities that were jointly made by the assistant principal and the coach, with whom he had developed good rapport and communications. In addition, the principal communicated that he was pleased with the way

that Project Transition was being implemented and generally focused his attention on other matters.

The coach had the strong support and friendship of the Learning Exchange representative. The two knew each other from past collaborations and continued to enjoy a good working relationship throughout the implementation of Project Transition. The Learning Exchange representative also had high expectations for what could be accomplished with the teams of teachers, and she communicated that enthusiasm to both the coach and the assistant principal throughout the year.

Along with the assistant principal and the coach, the Learning Exchange representative co-facilitated the full-group teacher team meetings, which were held once a week at the outset and twice a month thereafter. Although the Learning Exchange representative also believed that it was important to visit classrooms and offer feedback to teachers, she backed away from this role. As she explained:

> With regard to cooperative learning, there was a lot of resistance on the part of many teachers. This resistance pushed me into thinking that I shouldn't visit the teachers' classrooms, but of course this didn't mean that it wasn't appropriate for the coach or acting principal to do so. The teachers seemed to view me as an outsider, and they seemed threatened by that. I didn't want to antagonize them further, and I decided that it was more important to establish harmonious relationships with teachers.

In describing the work of the Learning Exchange representative, the acting principal commented at year's end, "She was wonderful and a very positive asset to the program. She offered an outside viewpoint, an expert opinion, and a great resource for up-to-date innovative ideas. She also very effectively modeled her talk."

The strong, cooperative working relationship that existed among the Learning Exchange representative, the coach, and the assistant principal appears to have been based on their ability to maintain flexibility with regard to their roles, respect and support each other, and stay focused on a shared vision of what they hoped to achieve through Project Transition, namely, an increase in the ability of students to learn through an increase in the ability of their teachers to teach them.

Professional development activities. The last element essential to Project Transition was the implementation of professional development activities, and the Learning Exchange was brought in to assist Schlagle staff in their development and participation in these types of activities. The Learning Exchange representative's objective — one also shared by the acting principal and the coach — was to introduce new concepts, new ways of thinking, and innovative classroom practices to the teachers. In addition to bringing in written materials and modeling techniques in her own presentations, she often introduced guest presenters from the Learning Exchange. A major thrust of her work throughout the year was assisting the Project Transition staff to become more proficient with cooperative learning techniques, an instructional approach strongly endorsed by the coach and assistant principal. All three viewed cooperative learning as a vehicle for increasing teachers' competencies in other areas (such as classroom management) and for improving their attitudes toward their students.

Classroom visits by the coach and the assistant principal enabled them to identify teachers who were experiencing difficulties. These teachers were given one-on-one coaching by the coach or Learning Exchange representative, or were sometimes sent to special seminars or outside training.

Each quarter of the school year, a day was set aside so that Project Transition teachers and staff could attend an all-day retreat that enabled them to engage in focused professional development activities that could increase their ability to carry out specific objectives of Project Transition. Initially, the content and focus of these retreats were designed by the coach, the assistant principal, and the Learning Exchange representative. In response to critical feedback from teachers after the first two retreats, the Project Transition leadership was careful to invite the teachers' views and to incorporate their opinions on how future retreats could be best structured to enhance their professional development. The Learning Exchange representative described this evolution:

> Harmonious relationships with the teachers became increasingly difficult over time, because teachers seemed to create an "us versus them" mentality with "us" being the teachers and "them" being the assistant principal, coach, and myself. During the weekly all-team meetings, I would often give out articles about teaching, learning, or other educational issues, but some teachers seemed to view the literature as an attack on their teaching abilities. After one retreat, I decided to ask the teachers to pick and choose their own articles to bring in and share with the rest of the Project Transition staff, but they never did. Over time, the assistant principal, coach, and I learned to be less forceful about what we thought the teachers needed for their professional development. At the beginning of the year, we would discuss what to put on the agenda for the upcoming retreats and set it up accordingly. After a couple of retreats, we decided to back off and get feedback from the teachers on what to put on the agenda for the large-team meetings [held on Wednesdays, after school], or the retreats.

While the Learning Exchange representative's comments reveal that tensions existed around the topics that were pursued for professional development, professional development remained a strong component of Project Transition. The level of activity in this area was high, and teachers, despite their frustrations, participated regularly, with virtually all of them attending all project meetings.

V. The Meaning of Project Transition at Schlagle High School

The ability of the coach, the assistant principal, and the Learning Exchange representative to work well together, as well as their dedication, hard work, and skill at mobilizing the teacher teams, created a synergy that was an important force behind the implementation of Project Transition at Schlagle High School. In general, these leaders were able to keep the Project Transition teachers focused on their individual and collective mission by:

1. Emphasizing that the purpose of Project Transition was to help students achieve better outcomes, both socially and academically.

2. Stressing that all teachers, even those with several years of teaching experience, needed continually to find ways to improve their teaching practice.

3. Reminding the teachers that they were part of a team, and that it was their responsibility to work and to cooperate with each other for the good of their students.

From the beginning of the project, teachers expected that Project Transition would enable them to learn new skills in a supportive environment and to develop new ways of interacting together that would lead to better outcomes for students. As the year progressed, they became actively engaged in a number of team activities and made progress in their ability to achieve group goals.

Students were quite aware that they were part of a special program called Project Transition, and they had several different responses to it. They liked having a team of teachers who knew them very well, and they recognized that this could help them in their academic pursuits. On the other hand, they quickly became bored with seeing the same classmates all the time, and they felt deprived of opportunities to get to know students in other clusters or in other grades. Yet, most Project Transition students agreed that they enjoyed coming to school, and unlike many students in large, comprehensive high schools, they did not feel isolated within a vast crowd of strangers.

In summary, Project Transition was fully implemented at Schlagle High School. As hypothesized, the project was able to create communities of both teachers and students who knew each other well and who came to understand that increased student learning was an important objective that needed to be achieved.

Chapter 4

Teachers and Their Activities

I. Introduction

The Project Transition model hypothesized that team meetings, work with the coach, and other professional development activities would lead to increased teacher engagement with students and colleagues, improved instructional methods, and support for students who fall behind. Chapters 2 and 3 indicate that the intervention resulted in strengthened collegial bonds. Using qualitative evidence and the findings of the teacher survey, this chapter examines the ways in which Project Transition affected teachers' interactions with their students both inside and outside the classroom.[1] After this brief introduction, the chapter considers each site in turn. Part II discusses the experiences of the Pulaski teachers, and Part III turns to those of their Schlagle counterparts.

II. Teachers' Experiences at Pulaski High School

A. Small-Group Teacher Team Meetings as a Forum for Discussion and Planning

As Chapter 2 indicated, the small-group teacher team meetings constituted the core of the Project Transition intervention at Pulaski High School. The discussions that took place and the decisions that were reached during these meetings are key to understanding the ways in which Project Transition helped to reshape teacher-student interactions at the school.[2]

Team-meeting discussions were predominantly centered on the same broad topics throughout the two years under study. A meeting observed in December 1995, some three and a half months after the demonstration began, was fairly typical of many team meetings, although not all were so productive:[3]

Like all the small-group teacher team meetings, this one took place in the classroom of one of the team members. The team spent most of the meeting reviewing students' problems. Fifteen students were discussed. The issues varied and included the students' personal problems, classroom disruptions, poor performance, and sexual harassment. For each student discussed, one

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[1]The absence of baseline information on the teachers' behavior, as well as of data from teachers who were not in the project, makes it impossible to establish the extent of behavioral change that actually occurred with the precision and rigor sometimes found in quantitative studies. Rather, the data in this chapter, which are based primarily on teachers' self-reports, should be seen as mainly reflective of teachers' *perceptions* of their behavior, of changes in that behavior, and of the degree to which Project Transition was responsible for such changes.

[2]Many, if not most, students were aware of the teacher team meetings. As one boy put it, "The teachers gossip about us in [name of teacher's] classroom every second hour." None of the students participating in the focus groups expressed distress at this practice.

[3]MDRC observers attended a few meetings that began late and ended early or where there was no clear focus on topics related to students or instructional activities.

team member took responsibility for following up, usually by speaking with the student and also by calling parents or contacting specialized school staff (the counselors, school social worker, nurse, etc.). The team made plans to discuss all their English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students during the next team meeting. The discussion was generally serious, with several teachers adding information on each student. There was also a brief discussion of an integrated project that two teachers were preparing.

This example suggests that much of the time spent in team meetings was devoted to discussing "problem" students, a finding corroborated by responses to the teacher survey. Nine of the 12 teachers reported that they met regularly to discuss problems with students in class. (In contrast, only five said that they met regularly to discuss different ways of teaching the class.) When team teachers talked about instruction, their conversation was likely to revolve around the development and execution of integrated curriculum units or of field trips associated with these units.

These topics — teachers' responses to problem students and the new instructional approaches they put in place — are the subjects of the next two sections of this chapter. The discussion of teacher-student interactions at Pulaski concludes by examining the extent to which the 12 Project Transition teachers felt effective in their instructional roles.

B. Talk About Students: Problems and Solutions

Team meetings often began with talk about problem students: students who were absent from a particular class that day or had been absent all week, students who talked too much in class or displayed an "attitude," students who presented more serious discipline problems, students whose academic performance had fallen off notably. As one teacher explained, "That's on teachers' minds as they walk in the door."

Talk about problem students served several purposes. It allowed teachers to vent their frustrations. It provided reassurance, especially when teachers heard that their colleagues were having difficulty with particular students. It enabled them to learn from other team members about issues students were facing that might explain their behavior. Finally, it could lead to efforts to address the problems.

As noted in Chapter 2, teachers generally viewed students' problem behavior, along with their poor academic performance, as arising from the students' home situations or from other forces outside the classroom. Much of the talk in the team meetings concerned what teachers had come to learn about these situations. For example, a teacher in whom a student had confided might report that the student had to take care of her younger siblings, or that the student was planning to be out of school for several days because his family was visiting relatives in a distant state. Teachers noted that a better understanding of the difficulties facing a student might help them to approach or address the student more sensitively or lead them to make fewer demands of her.

In the teams, teachers developed collective strategies for dealing with problem students. These included discussing the student with other personnel at the school (administrators, guidance counselors, the school psychologist and social worker, etc.); bringing the student in for a

conference with the teacher team and sometimes with an administrator as well; and changing a student's schedule within the team (e.g., when two students wrangled constantly, or when a student persisted in being disruptive). Some strategies, too, were directed toward informing and engaging the students' parents to enlist their support in changing the students' behavior: Thus, teachers sometimes called the homes of absent students (or had a paraprofessional do this) rather than relying solely on the school's automated system for contacting absentees;[4] or they asked the parents to come to a teacher-student conference. One team instituted the practice of sending interim progress reports to parents to keep them up to date on their children's attendance and performance.

Consonant with their explanations of the nature of students' academic difficulties, the teachers tended to give most attention to strategies designed primarily to deal with students' personal problems and to affect their academic performance as a secondary effect of such interventions (e.g., if students came to class more regularly or worked harder). As one teacher put it, team meetings gave the teachers "time to get together to help kids deal with their out-of-school lives so that these don't interfere with their in-school lives." In general, they spent relatively little time talking about educational or instructional methods that might affect students' work or their behavior. From time to time, teachers might mention to their teammates an instructional practice that had proved effective with a particular student experiencing academic difficulties (e.g., having a higher-achieving student work with a lower-achieving one, or giving written comments praising their positive achievements). But observations of teacher meetings and interviews with the Project Transition teachers suggest that the teachers generally noted these practices and techniques in passing and did not explore them in much depth.

Consistent with their general perspective, too, is the fact that when teachers talked about setting common expectations for students, these expectations were more often behavioral than academic. One teacher offered several examples of expectations her team had established, including being in class on time, not congregating outside the door before the bell, having a separate notebook for each class, and exhibiting respect and self-control.

It is possible that a more proactive coach who routinely attended team meetings might have been able to change the terms of the discussion from students' personal lives to teachers' instructional activities. The resource support teacher did not steer the teachers to use their team-meeting time to scrutinize their assumptions and practices as teachers or to grapple with new concepts.[5] Discussions of academic solutions to students' problems may also come with greater

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[4]The school's automated absenteeism response system was triggered solely by homeroom attendance. If a student attended homeroom but cut one or all subsequent classes, this did not lead to an automated phone call. The team meetings enabled teachers to follow up promptly when students were selectively absent from classes.

[5]He might have done this, for instance, by providing information on and modeling a discussion of students' academic as well as behavioral needs, talking about how teachers might use individualized assignments to meet those needs, or asking teachers to describe and assess the effectiveness of particular classroom activities. Asked to recall examples of how he had offered feedback at team meetings, the resource support teacher came up with two instances of such feedback. One concerned integration of instruction around a curricular unit, a topic with which teachers were already at least somewhat familiar. The second example could best be described as concerned with logistics: asking teachers planning a field trip how they intended to assign students to chaperones and buses.

experience in working together as a team: There is some indication that teachers on the team that had been in existence the longest talked more than members of the other two teams about the various learning strategies each teacher used and the instructional techniques that appeared to be effective with students who were having difficulty.

C. Use of Integrated Curricula and Other Instructional Practices

A second focus of the team meetings was the development of curriculum units that brought multiple disciplines into play. Two of the three teams made extensive use of integrated curricula, especially during the second demonstration year. On the survey, five teachers expressed agreement with the statement, "I make a conscious effort to coordinate the content of my class with teachers in other subject areas"; no teachers disagreed. Moreover, seven teachers reported that their students worked on problems or explored content in conjunction with other subjects or classes at least once per week.

Integrated projects were often a source of pride for both teachers and students. Teachers enjoyed collaborating on them. They also believed that these units were more interesting for students and helped the students recognize the interrelatedness of the separate subjects they were studying. Two of the integrated projects attracted considerable attention from the local media.

One team developed a "heritage quilt." Each student on the team chose a person whom they wanted to honor. In math class, the students made careful measurements before cutting out individual squares of fabric. In science class, they colored the squares with natural dyes made of blackberry juice, onion skins, and red cabbage and made phototransfers onto the squares of pictures of the people they had chosen to honor. In social studies class, they studied the cultures of honorees from different national backgrounds. And in English class, they wrote a research paper on what they had learned as well as a personal message about the person they had chosen; the message appeared both on their square and in a Heritage Book. The completed quilt contained more than 100 one-foot squares. For many students, writing about people they loved and respected was a moving experience, and it was exciting for them to make presentations about the project to other organizations interested in hearing about and replicating the project.

A second effort, Project ICON (International Conference of Nations), was a United Nations simulation project involving 38 students drawn from a team's English and social studies classes. The Pulaski team represented Chile and used a number of computerized data bases to research that country along with such topics as international trade, the environment, and human rights. Using the Internet, the Pulaski teams then negotiated Chile's positions on various issues with student teams from around the world who represented 20 other countries. The project helped the students develop an understanding both of international affairs and of how computers can be used for research, word processing, and communications. It gave them experience working as a team. And, as a student wrote, "We learned, more than anything, that it is very difficult to get all countries to agree on a solution." The project seemed to have secured students' active engagement: Attendance was nearly perfect, and most students worked hard and earned high grades.

Other integrated efforts were more contained but illustrate the teachers' creativity in developing joint projects. For example, the English and science teachers on one team developed a

project in which students conducted research and wrote essays on endangered species; the essays were compiled into a booklet that was produced by a word-processing class at the school. On another team, the science and English teachers collaborated on a hydroponics project; the science lab was filled with plants being grown in water, while in their English classes, students pretended they were beans and wrote autobiographical essays.

The teachers' experiences with curriculum integration were not wholly successful. The English and social studies teachers on one team developed a unit on careers that involved a field trip to the Milwaukee Career Center, where each student researched a career in which he or she was interested. Each student also drew up a household budget based on the starting salary of that career and prepared a resume and a "futuristic autobiography" based on the career. However, the team as a whole never succeeded in getting plans for an elaborate interdisciplinary unit on geothermal areas off the ground. One obstacle, according to two of the team's members, was that the teachers did not have an adequate understanding of the benefits of integrated units, or of how to implement them. A team member also speculated that the team members had spent too much of their common planning period time talking about student-related issues and too little about curriculum.[6] Some teachers suggested in retrospect that this was an area where Alverno staff could have provided assistance during the summer institute.

A further issue was that math teachers on all three teams found it hard to figure out how they might make a more significant contribution to the interdisciplinary units. In their view, algebra, because of its abstract nature, did not fit in well with the very concrete activities in which other core-subject teachers were engaged.

Nonetheless, on the whole, the experience of being involved in integrated projects was satisfying for teachers and students alike, and at the conclusion of the demonstration, it seemed likely that teachers would continue to develop and put in place new integrated units. (Indeed, one teacher commented that as the 1996-97 school year drew to a close, his team had run out of time to try out all of its ideas for integrated projects.) It is also likely that if teachers had not had the time to discuss and plan these projects in their team meetings, they would have made much less progress on this front.[7] The integrated projects are, it might be argued, the most innovative and outstanding academic legacy of Project Transition at Pulaski High School.

D. Teachers' Feelings About Their Work with Students

Given teachers' perceptions of students' ability to learn as shaped by factors over which they had no control, it is not surprising that most Project Transition teachers did not believe that they could be effective with all their students. Their reservations on this score emerge clearly both in interview data and in responses to the teacher survey. One experienced teacher recalled

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[6]The team leader concurred with this assessment of how teachers had spent this time, noting that most often, team meeting discussions revolved around whether the other teachers had seen a student who had been absent from a particular class.

[7]Teachers also spent part of their time during a summer institute held before the second academic year of the demonstration in developing integrated curriculum units for the coming year. It is worth noting, too, that one team, in addition to its common planning period meetings, met off-site for two hours each month in order to talk about curriculum away from the press of other business.

youthful feelings of idealism on first entering teaching and how those feelings had changed: "You never reach all your students. You have dreams and visions, but. . . . Even administrators will tell you, 'If you can reach one or two of them, you're doing good.' I remember seeing *To Sir With Love* as a new college graduate, wanting to go out and conquer the world. But you come to realize you can't reach all kids, because there's so much stuff you have no control over."

One teacher, asked whether she could reach all students, offered a typical response: "Definitely not — the chaos that's going on in their lives is an obstacle." Other barriers mentioned by teachers included the "baggage" that students brought to class and "parents who don't give the idea that school is important."

On the survey too, teachers' responses on questions concerning their ability to affect student learning behavior reflect a certain futility. Only three teachers agreed that if they tried really hard, they could get through to the most difficult or unmotivated students. Only five teachers disagreed with the statement, "There is really very little I can do to ensure that most of my students achieve at a high level." (One agreed, and the rest were neutral.) In general, teachers seemed to feel that either students arrived at Pulaski predisposed to attend regularly and to learn or they did not and that they could modify these attitudes only within fairly narrow limits.

Project Transition, then, did not result in teachers holding higher academic expectations for their students nor did it significantly alter their beliefs about the students' ability to learn. This fact does not mean that teachers had given up, or were "burned out." Indeed, the teachers' involvement with the project may well have helped forestall burnout, by giving them an opportunity to vent frustrations, seek solutions, and try out new curricula. But teachers' beliefs did make for satisfaction with small victories. As one teacher (perhaps carrying the point to an extreme) commented, "If I reach five or 10 kids out of a class of 30, I think I've done my job." Some teachers, too, expressed the hope that when their 9th-grade students returned as sophomores, they would exhibit a new-found maturity and readiness to learn.

III. Tasks and Problem-Solving Strategies at Schlagle High School

As at Pulaski, so too at Schlagle High School, teacher teams were unquestionably at the center of Project Transition's implementation. This section focuses on the goals and tasks that the teacher teams at Schlagle, in concert with the project leadership, attempted to accomplish: building relationships with students and parents, managing discipline, raising expectations and performance standards, and incorporating new teaching modalities. In addition, this section examines how teachers developed professionally through their team experiences leading to greater accountability within teams and increased expectations for students.

A. Building Relationships Within the Project Transition Community

Welcoming activities. Just before school began in August 1996, Schlagle held an evening orientation program for students and their parents. Each student received an individualized schedule card that was color coded to indicate his or her team. The meeting began in the auditorium with an introduction to Project Transition, during which the principal and assistant principal asserted their belief that the project was important for students' successful entry to high school

and described the school's planning efforts over the preceding year, including the summer institute for teachers. Then, students stayed in the auditorium to hear greetings from the new principal, while parents went to meet with their children's teacher teams. The teachers on each team presented themselves as a unit whose members would be working together for the benefit of the students; they also talked about what they hoped to achieve in the upcoming year.

The orientation session received good reviews. According to the school librarian, who was also the parent of a student on one of the teams, parents came away very excited and hopeful about what they heard. She reported that the teachers made parents feel that they were accessible and that parents could call them at any time. During student focus groups held in October, many students said that they had attended the orientation and that the information had helped them know what to expect during the first week of school.

At the beginning of the school year, other activities were also conducted that enabled students to become quickly acclimated to Project Transition. Project teachers held classroom exercises that allowed students to introduce themselves to their classmates. The teachers explained class rules and expectations for the year ahead, distributed agendas, or planners, with the 9th-grade bell schedule, explained how the planners should be used, gave directions to students on how to get to their next class, and stood in the hallways to point students in the right direction. Students reported that teachers were helpful and welcoming during the first week of school.

Parent-teacher contacts. The teacher teams thought it was important to increase parental participation in parent-teacher conferences scheduled for the end of the first-quarter marking period. Some teachers expressed pessimism about achieving these results, given their past experience with poor parent turnout for parent-teacher conferences at Schlagle. However, the coach refused to give in to this pessimism and noted that more creative outreach methods had allowed middle-school teachers to increase parent turnout dramatically. Backed up by a few teachers who had taught in middle schools, she encouraged the teams to think of new ways that might work to bring the parents in. The suggestions that emerged included telephone and letter-writing campaigns.

As a result of their efforts, the teacher teams were successful beyond their expectations in increasing the number of parents who participated in the conferences. Parents' attendance increased from 20 percent of the 9th-grade class in the previous year to 70 percent in the 1996-97 school year. Teachers were greatly encouraged and began to see themselves as capable of accomplishing future successes with their students. The high parent turnout also made some teachers realize that the parents of their students really cared about the academic success of their children and challenged the stereotype that poor parents were not as concerned about these issues as wealthier parents. Teachers came to understand both that they were accountable to parents as well as students and that parents were a resource they could draw on in working with students.

Throughout the year, teacher teams maintained close contacts with students' parents. When students were identified as having academic or behavioral problems, the teams often talked about how to get their parents involved in the solution. Teacher teams often made use of individualized parent-teacher-student conferences, in which both the student and the parent met with the student's team of teachers.

At the end of the school year, parents and students were invited to attend an Awards Night ceremony at the school. The event was planned by Project Transition staff to reward students for exemplary academic performance and behavior. A number of different categories for awards were created, and teachers nominated students from all three teams to receive these awards. Project staff later reported that it was a moving evening for teachers, students, and their parents.

Inclusion of paraprofessionals into the teams. Because about 80 more students were enrolled in the freshman class than originally had been expected, the assistant principal, principal, and Project Transition staff successfully petitioned the Kansas City, Kansas, school district to fund the hiring of three paraprofessionals (paras), each of whom was assigned to work with one of the teacher teams.

Teachers welcomed the paras (a retired school teacher, a person who had worked extensively with at-risk youth in the community, and a person with previous experience working with youth in the community) into their team structure and collaborated on ways to make maximum use of their skills. Unless they were needed for a task, they attended all team meetings, where they offered opinions and solutions to problems, which were respected by the teachers. The paras helped students with their assignments inside the classroom and sometimes engaged students in more intensive work or review after class as well. As a result, the paras appeared to develop close relationships with students, thus providing students with additional social and academic supports.

Paras were instrumental in their ability to help teachers coordinate activities with interdisciplinary units across classrooms and subject areas. Unlike teachers, who were stationed in their own classrooms, paras were able to follow student clusters as they moved from class to class. This enabled paras to give each teacher additional information about the activities their colleagues had engaged in in previous classes, allowing teachers to coordinate with each other more closely on the interdisciplinary unit, on a daily basis. Furthermore, this information allowed teachers to become more productive in their daily team meetings, enabling them to modify or analyze their activities more efficiently.

The paras appeared to have good working relationships with the Project Transition teachers, who seemed grateful for their assistance. The hiring of paras enhanced teachers' job satisfaction by greatly reducing their feelings of frustration over large class sizes, by increasing their sense of efficacy in their outreach efforts to students, and by increasing their ability to coordinate academic activities across classrooms during interdisciplinary units.[8] While a number of factors accounted for teachers' feelings of satisfaction with their jobs, it is worth noting that on the teacher survey conducted at the end of the year, all the Project Transition teachers at Schlagle indicated that most of the time, they were very or moderately satisfied with their jobs.

[8]Paraprofessionals were not hired in Project Transition's second and third years of operation. Teachers later said that the Project Transition program was strengthened by the inclusion of paras and that the use of paras should be a permanent aspect of the Project Transition model.

B. Managing Discipline

From the very beginning of the Project Transition demonstration period, teachers used their team membership to portray themselves to students as a unit that was to be taken seriously. While trying to convey that they would be very supportive of students, they also communicated that students would have significant consequences to deal with for lack of cooperation and that certain behaviors would not be tolerated. Students quickly found out that if they misbehaved in one classroom, they would not only have to answer to that teacher but to an entire team of teachers. Students also learned that parents would be brought in to face an entire team of teachers during a parent-teacher-student conference. A student could no longer accuse one teacher of lack of fairness (or other transgressions) without also involving his entire team of teachers. At the same time, teachers could present corroborating evidence of a student's lack of cooperation across all their classrooms, if that was the case. From the beginning of the year, the teacher teams had successfully reached out to parents, and the payoff was that more parents grew to support the teacher teams. The combination of parents, teachers, and Project Transition leaders at work together created a system that allowed student problems to be identified and dealt with early on.

By October, some students were beginning to believe that Project Transition was a punishment designed to keep them under control. They also believed that they were not being respected as individuals as a result of the low expectations some teachers had of 9th graders' social behavior. Following are typical student comments:

> I don't think they [teachers] treat us with enough respect because of the class of last year . . . because they think that we're gonna act just like the class of last year.
>
> It's like we're catching what they [teachers] had in store for them [past students] from last year.
>
> I think they don't give us enough respect because of the recent years they had: a lot of fights and immaturity.
>
> This year, the teachers are ready to act and stop us. So that's why they put us into teams. Well, I don't think there's no difference [between themselves and past students], but we're not that bad! If they give us a chance, we'll be good.

These student reactions may have resulted from the actions of the teacher teams, which had become a lot tougher on discipline than the students expected. In prior years, individual teachers were only permitted to refer students to assistant principals who then handled disciplinary procedures themselves. But during the implementation of Project Transition, the assistant principals allowed the teams to take over this function, and even to have major input in suspension decisions. This put Project Transition teachers in a more empowered position, which they were confidently able to reinforce with their students. Control was more firmly placed in the

teachers' hands,[9] and by the second half of the school year, most Project Transition teachers were enjoying a level of cooperation among 9th-grade students that was unprecedented in the recent history of Schlagle.

C. Raising Expectations and Performance Standards

As Project Transition teachers began to feel more in control of students' behavior, they were in a better position to begin to consider students' academic performance and to examine their own practice as educators. Several other factors also propelled this examination.

First, in a memo intended to provide feedback to Schlagle staff, MDRC observers reported that the majority of Project Transition teachers saw the initiative as a means of improving student behavior but neglected to discuss ways in which it could assist with students' academic problems. When one team questioned this finding and decided to play back tapes of its meetings, team members discovered that, indeed, most of their conversations about students had centered on behavior rather than on academics. The team decided to make a conscious effort to shift its focus by developing an interdisciplinary unit that would capture students' interest and attention.

A second critical event that compelled the teachers to pay more attention to their students' academic performance was their discovery at the end of the first marking period that many students — especially those who had not made up their work after being absent — were failing their classes. Some teachers seemed very discouraged about the number of students they had to fail (one teacher failed about half her students) and wondered about their ability to reach these students. The coach and assistant principal worked hard to maintain a positive attitude among the Project Transition staff. At the same time, the high number of failures suggested that teachers needed to use formal action plans to address academic as well as student behavior concerns and that they needed to devise a better strategy for following up on absentees.

Finally, the coach, assistant principal, and Learning Exchange representative were primed to work with teachers on pedagogy. They repeatedly hammered home the message that classroom practice had to be strengthened; that students needed to become more interested and engaged in the academic content with which they were presented; and that if students were challenged to perform at a higher standard, their behavior would improve.

D. Incorporating New Teaching Modalities

A focus on cooperative learning. Beginning with the summer institute, the assistant principal, coach, and Learning Exchange representative strongly encouraged teachers to use cooperative learning techniques in their classrooms. They maintained that cooperative learning would make classes more interesting for students and would increase their feelings of academic engagement. Teachers received handouts on cooperative learning during the first week of school, and other resource materials were available in the conference room where all project meetings were held. The representative from the Learning Exchange also discussed cooperative learning in

[9]This only occurred among Project Transition team teachers. Other teachers in the school did not enjoy this level of autonomy, and the enforcement of discipline was perceived as weak throughout the remainder of the school environment by both Project Transition and non-Project Transition teachers.

detail at several meetings attended by all project staff, and the project leadership modeled this technique in actual classrooms and at the full-group teacher team meetings.

Teachers reacted nervously to this intense introduction; many seemed overwhelmed by the emphasis on this learning modality. Over time, many teachers continued to voice discomfort about trying cooperative learning in their classrooms. They argued that many of their students lacked the social skills or maturity to work together in a cooperative manner and that teachers would be less in control of their classes as a result.

Eventually, the coach, Learning Exchange representative, and assistant principal backed away from their heavy emphasis on cooperative learning in order to work on building the skills and confidence of individual teachers. The project leadership realized that some teachers could not incorporate cooperative learning techniques until other skills were firmly in place. As the assistant principal noted in retrospect:

> One of the biggest things we learned has to do with our approach in presenting cooperative learning. Next time, before introducing a method of teaching, I would focus more on the planning aspect of teaching. It was November before I realized that the teachers were not planning effectively. It was then that I realized that we were trying to get them to second base before they even got up to bat! Consequently, some of them were overwhelmed with the approach.

As time went on, some teachers became more willing to take risks, and they began to integrate cooperative learning in small dosages, using the coach's feedback to continue to refine the technique. After experiencing some initial successes, these teachers were later able to work with their colleagues and to offer them informal feedback, either individually or in team meetings. By the end of the school year, all teachers had tried cooperative learning techniques, and at some point, all had incorporated classroom activities that had students working together in small groups. However, some teachers used group work much more frequently than other teachers. On the teacher survey, 83 percent of the teachers reported that students worked in small groups almost every day in their classrooms, while the remaining 17 percent used small-group work between once or twice a week and once or twice a month. Three-quarters of the teachers strongly agreed that teachers should try to ensure that students learn to work well in a group; the rest moderately agreed.

The coach reported that by the end of the year, the Project Transition teachers were becoming known throughout the school as the resident experts on cooperative learning. She believed that the teachers would be in a good position to offer help to other teachers in the building the next year, when block scheduling would be introduced. The coach predicted that faced with 90-minute classes, more teachers would feel the need to diversify their classroom activities.

Building interdisciplinary units and developing cooperative lesson plans. All three teams developed interdisciplinary curricular units that lasted from three to nine weeks (depending on the team) and involved themes and concepts related to the four primary academic subjects. One team's nine-week unit was particularly exciting to the students. Their engagement was especially rewarding to the teachers, who had spent an additional nine weeks preparing for the unit. (In actuality, the team began to develop the idea for the unit during the summer institute months

earlier.) The project exploited the idea that everybody loves a good mystery. The teachers created a crime scenario: the theft of a stuffed pink flamingo from the principal's office and the discovery of a ransom note demanding payment for its return. The students' assignment was to figure out the identity of the kidnapper by analyzing the available evidence. Each student had to write a 30-page report documenting all the evidence collected and analyzed, and building a case for the alleged criminal's prosecution. In their science class, students analyzed evidence from the crime scene (soil and hair samples, along with the ransom note, the handwriting of which was compared with the handwriting of five "suspects"). In their math class, they organized the data collected in science class into a data base and presented it in table form, along with descriptive statistics. In their geography class, they researched the characteristics of the geographic region — which included the crime scene — using the Internet. Finally, in their English class, they analyzed the way crime stories and mysteries are written.

The teachers exhibited considerable enthusiasm about the unit and reinforced the subject matter of other teachers in their own classes. (For example, the math teacher reminded students to complete their math assignment in a certain way, because they would need the information to take the next step in their science class.) Observations of classrooms indicated that for their part, students were highly involved in the tasks: They worked with concentration, either independently or in collaboration with other students, and appeared both to be taking their work very seriously and to be enjoying themselves. The problem-solving element of the unit seemed to be a strong "hook" for the students.

The interdisciplinary unit created by a second team centered on the theme of survival in the world. The survival theme was explored from a number of perspectives, such as survival in contemporary times versus survival in historical periods, and survival in the struggle against physical challenges versus survival against psychological challenges. Each academic subject focused on a particular perspective. For example, English classes focused on the theme of survival in literature: Students discussed ways in which people could improve their lives while examining current issues, such as homelessness among teenagers. Science and geography classes covered natural and manmade disasters in the world. Math class used the frontier movement in the American West as the context for practicing the math skills needed to pack wagons, find directions, and manage the trip to the West during the 1800s. The highlight of this integrated unit was a field trip to a lake where students had to employ outdoor survival skills that were similar to those used by the frontier people and required team cooperation. The teachers and the coach reported that the students handled themselves very well and accomplished their tasks responsibly.

Although this unit involved less planning time and was shorter in duration than the criminology unit, the teacher team that created it appeared to benefit considerably from the experience. One result was that the activity helped teachers to move beyond earlier disagreements over the handling of discipline based on their different value systems and personal styles of teaching. Working on an interdisciplinary project helped to unify the teachers as they learned how to coordinate with each other on a shared theme. The teachers discovered that they could have creative discussions on ways to link the four subjects together, they could respect each other's opinions, and they could keep the project moving.

Afterward, this team began to use the skills they had learned during the planning phase of their interdisciplinary unit to begin collaborating on their weekly lesson planning. At that point in time, the teachers needed to respond to an administrative mandate that requested that all teachers submit their weekly lesson plans to the principal's office. Rather than work on their lesson plans separately, the teachers began to compare their lesson plans in each subject area at their team meetings and to discuss ways in which they could reinforce one another's work once they returned to their individual classrooms. As the coach described it:

> One day, they were just sitting around talking about lesson plans that they were developing, and as they talked about what they were doing in their classrooms, they began to come up with ideas for integrating different things that other teachers were doing into work they were developing. They saw that they could do collaborative work across disciplines on a daily basis during their team meetings without developing a whole separate curriculum [which the team with the criminology unit had done and which this team perceived as too much work]. They found that this [collaborative lesson planning] helped them to become more creative and excited about what they were doing in the classroom, and they started doing this activity on a weekly basis.

The last team to incorporate interdisciplinary curricula did so reluctantly and put less effort into it than the other teams, perhaps in part because this team seemed to have more communication problems than the others. After much prodding from the coach, the team decided to focus on the theme of careers and devoted three team meetings to deciding what each teacher would do on this theme. In English classes, students learned how to write resumes and letters of interest to prospective employers. In science, the teacher surveyed the students to learn which careers they were interested in and made a presentation on those careers, discussing the experience and education they require and the remuneration they provide. The unit also involved guest speakers — who talked about interviewing, college entrance requirements, and courses of study — and field trips to the University of Kansas, in Lawrence, and to the corporate headquarters of Hallmark Cards, located in Kansas City, Missouri.

IV. Students' Reactions to the Interdisciplinary Units at Schlagle High School

Students loved the interdisciplinary unit on criminology, and students from other teams even said they were envious of what the criminology students had been able to do compared with the work that their own projects entailed.

Recognition of what the criminology students were accomplishing moved beyond the location of the school. The local newspaper in Kansas City, Kansas, published an article about the team's criminology project at Schlagle and how the 9th-grade students were responding to it. Two students gave a presentation to the Kansas City School Board on their work in the criminology unit and how it affected their interest in school..

Students on the team that covered the survival unit indicated that the material was interesting and enjoyable but that their teachers were too serious and didn't allow them to have as much fun with the material as they could have. Students from the team that focused on careers had no strong reactions to their interdisciplinary unit other than to say that the other teams had better projects than theirs.

V. The Process of Developing Higher Expectations: Reactions Among Students and Teachers at Schlagle High School

As described in previous sections of this report, the Project Transition leadership put pressure on teachers to incorporate methods that could increase students' engagement to their academics. With the introduction of cooperative learning and interdisciplinary teaching, some teachers attempted to motivate students by verbally communicating that they should work hard. These teachers told their students that they had to do better, that academics were important to their future. Students heard these messages and responded in different ways:

> Teachers never tell me, "I don't care if you don't do it [your work] or not. It's your grade." Teachers here never say that. They always say, "Think about who's gonna be hurt for not doing his work."

> I think some of my teachers are nice and some are mean, because they keep nagging you about your work, and they just keep on you, bringing it up and nagging you.

However, student misbehavior remained a strong concern among teachers especially when student misbehavior became more prevalent across all teams during the first quarter. One team greatly affected by this phenomenon responded by refusing to lower their academic standards, which led to the failure of many of their students at the end of the first quarter. This action may have served as a wake-up call to the students on this team. In a focus group held in October, students made the following remarks:

> Team [Name] is out of hand . . . our grades are bad because everybody talks [in class].

> In a lot of our classes, we can't get nothing done because our teachers be taking, like, the whole class period to get the class to be quiet, and like you said [to first student], there's a lot of failure, and I feel real bad that two of my teachers said that they feel that they're not doing their job as a teacher, because some of these students are failing. That's not fair how they're making the teacher feel. It's not the teachers' fault, it's their [the students] fault, because they're not doing what they need to get their education . . . and . . . they're interfering with my education.

Students became more sensitive about the disruptions of their peers and began to value those teachers who were able to get their classrooms focused on the work. One student said:

> I have respect for Mr. [Name] because Mr. [Name] don't take no stuff off of nobody. Mr. [Name] will get up in your face. Everybody likes Mr. [Name] because he's cool and everything. But you know, Mr. [Name] will let you know . . . he will get up in your face and tell you, "I'm not having this! This is *my* class, not your class." I respect Mr. [Name] for that . . . I like a teacher who knows how to control their class and don't take no stuff off of a person our ages.

At the same time, teachers who were not effective in controlling their class, or worse, who were perceived to be ineffective instructors, became a disappointment to their students. Furthermore, students were beginning to realize that teachers had a responsibility to teach them, and they had a responsibility to learn. The following comments from students are revealing:

> It seems like some teachers don't want to discipline or something. Because like, Mr. [NAME], he hardly ever disciplines his kids. Mr. [NAME] just sends them out in the hallway, and then he lets them come back in.

> I think on our team, the main teacher that the whole team has a problem with is Mr. [NAME]. And you have to be really careful how you come to Mr. [NAME] with your problems, because Mr. [NAME] will get an attitude. . . . If you say that you don't understand something, Mr. [NAME] don't try to explain it to you so that you can understand. Mr. [NAME] explains it to where *he* understands, and then that's the end of it.

> The whole class tried to talk to Mr. [NAME] because we thought that he was going too fast [over the subject matter]. And Mr. [NAME] said that he didn't think he was going too fast, that the other classes were ahead of us, and he wasn't going to slow down. . . . But I mean, some of us are trying to learn, and Mr. [NAME] will start talking about the subject, and then will just change the subject all of a sudden, and then start talking about something else. And, its confusing. The ones [students] who are trying to learn are sitting there trying to understand, and Mr. [NAME] will just up and change the subject.

While classrooms observations by the researcher confirmed that this particular teacher did have difficulty communicating the content area to students, it was interesting to see that students cared about the fact that they weren't learning and were willing to do something about it. In fact, they began to talk to their other team teachers about these issues, indicating that students believed that their other teachers cared enough about their education to address the problem as well. Messages about classroom expectations flowed from teachers to students but also from students to teachers.

A few months later during a full-group teacher team meeting, the staff discussed the feedback they had received from MDRC, which indicated that many students perceived the work they were given in the first quarter to be monotonous and less challenging than work completed in middle school. When teachers received this feedback, the second quarter had already begun, and one team had started their interdisciplinary unit. This unit was very demanding for both teachers (to design and teach) and students (who were being asked to complete more work than

usual). During the meeting, one teacher reacted to the feedback by saying that even when teachers tried to make the work more interesting and relevant, many students were still unresponsive and did not complete the required work. This teacher warned her colleagues that she would fail all the students who did not complete her requirements. She justified her actions by saying that if students were in college, and they failed to turn in a paper in time, they would simply fail the course. She said that she was preparing them for that reality. Some of her colleagues disagreed by saying that the students were still in high school. They added that their responsibility as teachers was to teach skills in a flexible manner so that students would develop the confidence they needed to complete their tasks, and they advised her to try different strategies that might help students complete the paper. The teacher did not utilize their advice and ultimately failed about a third of her students at the end of that quarter.

This example demonstrates that tensions can arise when teachers try to raise their expectations for what students can produce, and students, for whatever reason, do not respond as teachers expect them to. Project Transition teachers varied in their responses to this dilemma. A few teachers blamed students' motivations, and other teachers searched for ways in which to get students to try harder.

By mid-year, there was a noticeable shift in teachers' attitudes. Many teachers seemed to be benefiting from the coaching and professional development they were receiving, and many were developing a stronger belief in their ability to help their students. In turn, teachers who were increasing their sense of efficacy in terms of their ability to reach their students were more likely to try harder to help students meet the demands of higher academic expectations. A belief in students' potential seemed to be central to this process, as the following statements reveal:

> Students are capable of learning the material. . . . I'm pretty good at pinpointing what they can handle. They've reacted well to changes I've made in the curriculum and different cooperative learning exercises that I've tried.

> Absolutely [students are capable of learning the material]! The students complain about everything, but they show me that they are capable with the ideas they share in class and the discussions I hear them having with each other. Most people don't realize that kids are analyzing a lot more than adults give them credit for.

> Nothing is too hard for them too learn. If I wanted to, I could even teach them quantum physics, because nothing is too difficult for them. Sure, it may take some of them a little longer to catch on, but for most of them, things click after they've had a chance to mull it over for a few days. Students love to be challenged with skills that build on what they already know.

By the end of the school year, the teacher survey revealed that most teachers felt that modifications in their practice had enabled them to reach more students. To the statement, "If some students in this class were not doing well, I would try to change my approach to the subject," the majority of Schlagle teachers responded "strongly agree," while a minority agreed moderately. In addition, teachers at Schlagle were willing to give up their own time to work with students who needed help. To the statement, "I feel that I should be accessible to students even if

it means meeting with them before or after school, during my prep or free period, etc.," the majority of Schlagle teachers responded "strongly agree." Overall, when queried during the second half of the school year, most teachers came to believe strongly that they could improve their students' academic performance. Given where they started at the beginning of the school year — with a focus on student behavior — they made tangible progress in this area.

In summary, teachers developed a strong focus on student achievement as the year progressed, and students began to understand and to respond to these new expectations.

VI. Developing Accountability Within Teams at Schlagle High School

As the preceding sections document, teacher teams were focused on accomplishing a number of goals throughout the year. However, the ability to carry out these activities was based on a great deal of effort within teams, effort that was often stressful, because teachers varied in their personality, interests, and values. As one teacher later explained, "Teaming was useful this year. Members were connected, but I got frustrated at times [with personality conflicts]. We needed to learn each other's styles; what could be tolerated from each other. . . . This took some time, about the first two quarters [of the school year]."

An essential element in a team's ability to agree on goals and then to carry them out had to do with the team's ability to communicate among themselves and to reach consensus on different issues. But before an individual teacher could engage in this process with others, she sometimes had to go one step further and engage in a process of self-examination about her own teaching practice. To a great degree, the process of self-examination among teachers was encouraged by the mandate that teachers improve their classroom practice. As described in Chapter 3, this mandate came from the Project Transition leadership.

To assist teams, the coach, assistant principal, and Learning Exchange representative helped them to communicate and collaborate more effectively. During team meetings, they offered possible solutions to emerging problems, pushed teachers to think in terms of alternative methods and techniques, and encouraged teachers to collaborate more effectively. By asking questions in a nonjudgmental manner and framing solutions as suggestions, they encouraged teachers to be open about their difficulties as well as their achievements.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the teams were concerned with raising students' social skills. Teachers believed that improvement in social skills would enable students to get along better with their peers, resulting in fewer classroom distractions and a greater ability to collaborate on cooperative learning projects. At first, the coach, the Learning Exchange representative, and the assistant principal encouraged Project Transition teachers to pursue this strategy. But as the year unfolded, the Project Transition leadership began to emphasize to the teams that more classroom innovation was needed. A few teachers resisted this new emphasis by continuing to use the team meetings as a forum for venting their own difficulties with students. One teacher later said, "Our team did not accomplish everything we set out to do. We didn't tackle the curriculum as much as we could have. We discussed problem kids too much, especially with [Name]. [Name] would

come in and blow off steam everyday about the students. [Another teacher] and I spoke up about it after a while."

The Project Transition leadership's response was to work more closely with an individual teacher. The intensive focus on one teacher often included individualized professional development activities tailored to meet that individual's needs. One teacher who responded well to this intense attention later said, "I was stretched a lot this year. Handling discipline in the classroom was stressful, and team meetings were stressful because we had to learn how to talk, how to communicate with each other in order to help every student achieve the best future."

As a result of continuing dialogue and interaction among teachers and the Project Transition leadership, many teachers discovered that they could not place all of the blame for student misbehavior on students. These teachers began to look within themselves and their colleagues for some of the answers to the issues they were dealing with, and they began to realize that teaming was a difficult but useful process for creating accountability among themselves. As one teacher said, "Being a part of a team is still useful, because it makes me more accountable, and I like that. This affected my classroom teaching, because I knew that people were watching. This should happen at every grade level, because it keeps teachers honest and more hard working."

Not only did some teachers acknowledge that teaming could lead them to become more accountable but that lessons learned in teaming could rekindle the spark to excel as teachers. One teacher explained, "This year, I reflected more on my teaching practices than ever before. I had modified my teaching practice (downward) over the years. This year, Project Transition gave me hope that I could become a better teacher again."

Over the course of the year, team teachers began to learn how to be accepting and supportive of each other, despite the discovery of shortcomings and weaknesses. A teacher's ability to open up to his own shortcomings and concerns as a teacher often enabled other teachers to do the same. However, the process was not easy. As one teacher explained, "I've been a teacher for a number of years, and this is the hardest I've ever worked . . . all of us have worked hard this year."

The more open teachers were in team meetings about their own areas of weakness, and the more these teachers made public their attempts at self-improvement, the more likely it was that the entire team would benefit, because this invited other teachers on the team to work at self-improvement as well. One teacher who was willing to take the risk of opening up and working with others to improve her practice explained, "My fifth-hour class was the worse class I had in [several] years. But by the end of this year, this class had done a complete turnaround. I received support from a lot of people including [the coach, the learning resource partner], and other teachers."

To summarize, teachers learned how to work together constructively in their teams and to cooperate in activities that could aid in their development as teachers. As time went on, supportive teamwork enabled more teachers to engage in self-examination, leading to the development of a higher level of internal accountability. Moreover, external accountability among team members was heightened by professional development activities, the attention of outside stakeholders such as MDRC, and the interest of the Kansas City, Kansas, school district, which had to decide

if Project Transition should be continued as part of a wider reform effort called First Things First. And finally, internal and external accountability enabled the teams to stay focused on an understanding of their collective mission as Project Transition teachers, that is, to help students achieve the most that they could achieve, both academically and socially.

Chapter 5

Methods and Data

I. Introduction

The previous three chapters examined the implementation of Project Transition and its effects on teachers. The next step in the evaluation is to assess its effects on students. Key questions are whether Project Transition improved students' relationships with their classmates and their teachers; whether it increased their feelings of academic competence and engagement in school; and whether it improved their academic outcomes, such as attendance and grades. This chapter discusses the methodology and data sources used to analyze Project Transition's effects on students.

II. Method of Analysis

A. Research Design

The *impact* of a program is defined as the difference between students' performance in the presence of the program and what those same students would have achieved in the absence of the program. Although it is straightforward to measure students' performance while they are participating in Project Transition, it is necessary to estimate the *counterfactual*, or what their performance would have been had they not been in Project Transition.

For the evaluation, this estimate is obtained using the academic performance of the group of students who were 9th graders before Project Transition's implementation. Since each 9th-grade class is a separate cohort, this evaluation design is referred to as a *cohort comparison design*.[1] The effects, or *impacts*, of the program are then estimated by comparing *outcomes* for the group of students who were 9th graders when Project Transition was implemented (the program group) with outcomes for the group of students who were 9th graders before its implementation (the comparison group).

At Schlagle, for example, the effects of Project Transition were estimated by comparing outcomes for students who were 9th graders during the 1995-96 school year, hereafter referred to as the *pre-PT group*, with outcomes for students who were 9th graders during the 1996-97 school year, or the *PT group*. At Pulaski, student data were collected for two years following the implementation of Project Transition, providing two estimates of the program's effects. One estimate of Project Transition's impact was made by comparing outcomes for students who were 9th graders in the 1994-95 school year (the *pre-PT group*) with outcomes for students who were 9th

[1]One way typically used to estimate this counterfactual is an experimental evaluation, in which some students are chosen to participate in the program and others are not; both groups of students are then followed over time. The method of assigning students to one group or the other is random in order to ensure that there are no systematic differences in characteristics between the two groups.

graders during the 1995-96 school year (the *PT-1 group*). Another estimate was obtained by comparing outcomes for the pre-PT group with outcomes for students who were 9th graders during the 1996-97 school year (the *PT-2 group*).

An important assumption underlying the cohort comparison design is that the comparison and program groups, or the pre-PT and PT groups, contain similar types of students. In addition, the design requires that no major changes in school policy unrelated to Project Transition take place during the evaluation years. A violation of either of these assumptions poses problems for this type of evaluation design. For example, if the class of 9th graders in 1996-97 is composed of higher-achieving students than the class of 1995-96, as evidenced by higher middle school grades, then it is expected that the former group will have higher grades during 9th grade than the latter group, but these differences would not be the result of Project Transition.

B. Regression Adjustment

One way to account for differences in characteristics between the pre-PT and PT groups is to regression-adjust the impact estimates.[2] *Regression adjustment* attempts to eliminate any part of the difference in 9th-grade outcomes for the two groups that is due to differences in their characteristics before 9th grade. The previous example helps to illustrate. If the 9th graders in 1996-97 have higher GPAs than 9th graders in 1995-96, some part of this difference is probably due to the fact that the 1996-97 group also had higher middle school grades. Regression adjustment uses information on middle school grades to estimate what proportion of the difference in 9th-grade GPAs is due to differences in middle school grades. Any remaining difference in GPAs that is not accounted for by middle school grades can then be attributed to Project Transition.

The regression-adjustment procedure employed for this evaluation accounts for a range of *observable* student characteristics that may influence their 9th-grade academic performance but are unrelated to Project Transition, such as sex, race, and free lunch status. More important, the procedure also accounts for the students' performance in 8th grade (as measured, e.g., by GPA and attendance), since this is known to be an important determinant of performance in 9th grade.[3]

C. Statistical Significance

All impacts are tested for statistical significance. Testing for significance recognizes that some estimated impacts, or differences between groups, may arise due solely to chance or random variation. Impacts that are statistically significant can be thought of, with a reasonable degree of confidence, as representing a true difference between the groups, rather than a difference due to chance. The degree of confidence is referred to as the *level of significance*. For example, a difference that is statistically significant at the 10-percent level implies that there is only a 10 percent chance the observed difference is due to chance. For the analyses, only differences that are statistically significant at the 10-percent level are interpreted as program impacts.

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[2]Regression adjustment is also typically used in experimental evaluations to account for random differences between the program and control groups.

[3]The procedure does not account for the possibility that the groups differ in ways that are unobserved, or unmeasured.

III. Data

Given the evaluation design, the analysis of Project Transition's effects requires two types of data: data on student outcomes, or measures of student behavior that might be affected by Project Transition, and data on student characteristics used to regression-adjust the impact estimates. As described next, student surveys are used to obtain information on several types of student outcomes, and school records data are used to obtain information on additional student outcomes and student characteristics.

Before defining each of the outcomes, it is helpful to lay out the model underlying Project Transition's effects. This model, which is also used for constructing the student surveys, assumes that an individual's context helps to shape his self-perceptions. These beliefs — feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness to others in that environment (Connell, Spencer, and Aber, 1994) — then translate into engagement or disengagement in the activities within that context.

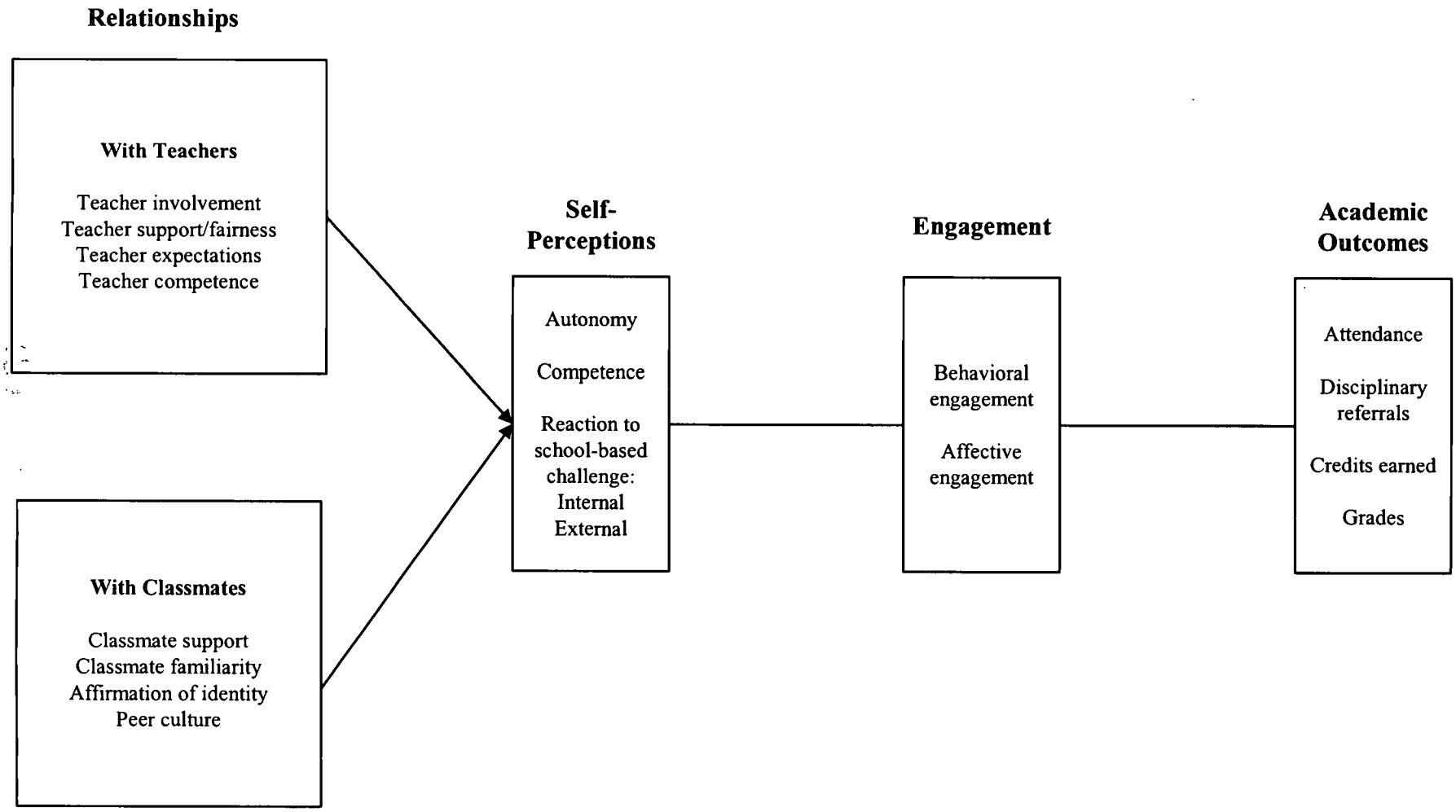
In the case of students, the context is the school environment. The quality of this environment influences students' beliefs about their ability to perform academically (competence); their control over their own behavior (autonomy); and their feelings of relatedness to teachers and classmates. For example, previous research has documented that several aspects of teachers' behavior, as perceived by students, are important determinants of students' self-perceptions, such as their belief that they know how to perform well in school. Two such behaviors are the extent to which students believe teachers provide them with clear expectations and consistent feedback and the extent to which students feel that teachers care about them (Skinner, Wellborn, and Connell, 1990).

The next step in the model shows how each of these factors influences student engagement. In other words, when students are faced with a school environment that makes them feel competent, autonomous, and related to others, they become engaged in school. Finally, engagement in school has been found to be a strong predictor of academic outcomes such as test scores, grades, attendance, and graduation (Connell, Spencer, and Aber, 1994).

This model is presented in Figure 5.1. The outcomes used in the evaluation are ordered based on their proximity to the Project Transition intervention. For example, by changing the school environment, Project Transition should most directly affect students' relationships with their teachers and their peers. These changed relationships should then influence students' self-perceptions, such as their feelings of autonomy and academic competence, which should then increase their engagement in school. Each of these factors is thought of as an intermediate outcome. Finally, increased engagement should improve the academic outcomes — higher attendance rates, fewer disciplinary incidents, higher grades, and more credits earned.[4] Information on

[4]Tests were conducted to assess how well the model fits the data. The results are discussed later in the chapter.

Figure 5.1
Model of Project Transition's Anticipated Effects on Students



the intermediate outcomes is obtained from the student surveys, and information on the ultimate outcomes is obtained from school records data.[5]

A. Student Survey

The Student Survey was administered to each group of students in both high schools during the spring semester of their 9th-grade year. The statements on the survey come primarily from the Reform Assessment Package for Students (RAPS) developed by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE), although they were adapted somewhat for the Project Transition evaluation.

The survey contains a range of statements with a choice of responses designed to measure students' perceptions of the school environment, including their relationships with teachers and classmates, their self-perceptions, and their engagement in school. Students were asked to rank the truthfulness of each statement on the survey, with possible answers being "not at all true," "not very true," "sort of true," and "very true." For the analysis, each of the responses was converted to a numeric value, with a higher number indicating a desired, or proacademic, response. For example, for the statement, "When I'm in class I try very hard," responses of "not at all true" were given a value of 1 and "very true" were given a value of 4. In contrast, for the statement, "I don't work very hard in school," responses of "not at all true" were given a value of 4 and "very true" were given a value of 1.

Each underlying factor, or *construct*, in the Project Transition model is measured as the average of responses to several survey statements; see Table 5.1 for the statements included in each construct.[6] Students' feeling of competence, for example, was measured by the average of responses to several statements about how much control they feel they have over their ability to do well in school. All the construct averages range from 1 to 4.

An important consideration in the analysis of survey outcomes is that not all students completed a survey. For Pulaski, the response rates, or the percentage of students who completed a survey, were 50 percent for the pre-PT group, 45 percent for the PT-1 group, and 50 percent for the PT-2 group. Response rates for Schlagle were 64 percent for the pre-PT group and 62 percent for the PT group. Nearly all of the students who were in attendance when the survey was given completed a survey. The low response rates, calculated as the number of responders as a fraction of the impact sample, are due in part to the fact that a substantial fraction of students were not enrolled at the school when the surveys were given (about 70 percent of students at both schools were enrolled at the PT school for the entire school year) and in part to the relatively high absence rates of those who were still enrolled. Nonetheless, the response rates suggest that the survey responders might not be representative of the full sample of students. In particular, respond-

[5]Although the model assumes that changes in the engagement outcomes precede changes in the academic outcomes, both are measured at the same time. It is also possible that academic performance has direct effects on students' feelings of competence and engagement.

[6]Factor analyses were conducted to examine how well each group of statements works to measure an underlying construct or how correlated they are with one another. The alpha values for all but three constructs were in the range of what it generally considered acceptable, between .6 and 1. The exceptions are affective engagement (alpha = .58), teacher expectations (alpha = .45), and classmate support (alpha = .52). See Table A.1 for the results.

Table 5.1

Project Transition Student Survey Constructs

I. Student Relationships

Student perceptions of teacher

Involvement

My teachers like to be with me.
My teachers care about how I do in school.
My teachers have plenty of time for me.
My teachers don't know me very well.

Support/fairness

My teachers treat me fairly.
My teachers think what I say is important.
My teachers let me decide things for myself.
My teachers treat me (and other students of my race/ethnicity) the same as other students.
My teachers try to control everything I do.

Expectations

Teachers act like they expect me to do well.
Teachers praise me when I do something well.
Teachers act like they don't expect me to work hard.

Competence

Teachers teach me things that are important for my future.
Teachers help me learn what I need to succeed.
Teachers know a lot about things I need to learn.

Student perceptions of classmates

Support

Students in class like it when I do well.
Students in class don't care if I do well.
Students in class help me with my school work.

Familiarity

I don't know a lot of students in class.
Students in class know me pretty well.

Affirmation of identity

Students in class aren't biased against me because of my race/ethnicity.
I feel like students in class are prejudiced against me because of my race/ethnicity.
Students in class respect me for who I am.
Students in class only like me when I do what they want.
In my class, the relationships between different racial/ethnic groups are good.

The best way to get respect is to:

dress the best
be the toughest
know how to get around the rules
cause trouble
be a good athlete

The best way to get respect is to:

do well
work hard
give others respect

Student feelings of relatedness

With teachers

When I'm with my teachers, I feel:
mad
unhappy
ignored
happy
important

With classmates

When I'm with my classmates, I feel:
ignored
mad
good

(continued)

Table 5.1 (continued)

II. Student Self-Perceptions

Perceived autonomy	*Perceived competence*
I do class work because I think it's important.	I can't do well in school.
I do class work because doing well in school is important.	I don't know what it takes to get good grades.
I do homework because I want to understand the subject.	I don't know how to keep from getting bad grades.
	If I'm unlucky, I won't do well in school.
	I can work really hard in school.
	I can't work very hard in school.
	I'm pretty smart in school.
	I'm not very smart in school.

Reaction to school-based challenge

Internal	*External*
When something bad happens to me in school:	When something bad happens to me in school:
I try to figure out what went wrong.	I get angry at the teacher.
I try to see what went wrong.	I say it was the teacher's fault.
I tell myself to do better next time.	I tell myself I don't care.

III. Student Engagement

Affective engagement	*Behavioral engagement*
When I'm in school, I feel happy.	When I'm in class, I try very hard.
I look forward to coming back to this school next year.	I don't work very hard in school.
When I'm in school, I feel bored.	I try to learn much as I can about school subjects.
	I pay attention in class.
	A lot of times I go to class without homework.
	In class I just act as if I'm working.
	On an average school night I do homework for:
	less than 1/2 hour
	1/2 to 1 hour
	1–2 hours
	more than 2 hours

SOURCE: MDRC Student Survey.

NOTES: Each construct is the average of responses to the individual questions. Possible responses to each question are "not at all true," "not very true," "sort of true," and "very true." Each of the responses was converted to a numeric value, with a higher number indicating a desired, or proacademic, response. For example, for the statement "When I'm in class, I try very hard," responses of "not at all true" were given a value of 1 and "very true" were given a value of 4. In contrast, for the statement "I don't work very hard in school," responses of "not at all true" were given a value of 4 and "very true" were given a value of 1.

ers might be more engaged in school, since students with less absenteeism were more likely to have been present on the days the surveys were administered. Appendix B presents an analysis of survey respondents. The results indicate that students who took the survey differ in many ways from those who did not. For example, girls were more likely to have responded to the survey at both schools, and at Pulaski, black students were much less likely than students of other races to have completed a survey. In addition, at both schools students who completed a survey had higher 8th-grade GPAs and attendance rates than students who did not.

This result suggests that it might not be possible to generalize results from the survey analysis to all 9th graders at Pulaski or Schlagle. Average responses on the survey, as well as Project Transition's impacts on survey outcomes, might differ from what they would have been had all students completed a survey. This issue should be kept in mind when interpreting analyses of the survey data.

Table 5.2 presents average construct ratings for the pre-PT 9th graders in both schools. Since responses were assigned numeric values ranging from 1 to 4, with higher numbers indicating pro-academic responses, a rough benchmark for assessing students' perceptions is if the average construct value is 3 or higher. The values in the table indicate that the average pre-PT student at both schools did not report that she felt supported by or involved with her teachers, since these two constructs were below 3 for both groups. In contrast, the average student, at least at Pulaski, felt that her teachers were competent and held positive expectations for her academic performance (teacher competence and teacher expectations). For all constructs measuring teacher-student relationships, the average scores are somewhat higher at Pulaski than at Schlagle, and these differences — except that for teacher support and fairness — are statistically significant. Comparing survey responses for the two schools may not be appropriate, however. Because response rates were lower at Pulaski, respondents at this school may be a more select group of students than respondents at Schlagle.

With respect to peer relationships, the average student knew at least some of his peers, although more so at Schlagle than Pulaski (classmate familiarity is 2.94 for Pulaski, and 3.35 for Schlagle). This difference is consistent with the fact that most students at Schlagle come from three middle schools. In addition, although the average student did not feel that his classmates were biased against him (student affirmation of identity), he did not feel supported by them, as indicated by the values for classmate support (2.12 and 2.17). Overall, Schlagle can be characterized as having better student-student relationships; all of the differences between the two schools, with the exception of classmate support, are statistically significant.

The bottom rows present values for autonomy, competence, and engagement. On average, students in both schools reported feeling that they had the ability to do well in school (perceived competence) and that they did school work because it was important to them (perceived autonomy). In addition, students at Schlagle reported feeling more academically competent than did their counterparts at Pulaski; average values for perceived competence were 3.17 for Pulaski and 3.48 for Schlagle, and this difference is statistically significant. Finally, the relatively high ratings for autonomy and competence at both schools do not appear to be associated with high levels of engagement. Average ratings for both behavioral and affective engagement were below 3 for both groups.

Table 5.2

Average Survey Construct Ratings for Pre-Project Transition Groups

Construct	Pulaski High School	Schlagle High School
Student perceptions of teachers		
Involvement	2.60	2.41
Support/fairness	2.89	2.84
Expectations	3.09	2.92
Competence	3.20	2.99
Student perceptions of classmates		
Support	2.12	2.17
Familiarity	2.94	3.37
Affirmation of identity	3.02	3.25
Student perceptions of the best way to get respect		
To be nondisruptive	2.42	2.59
To work hard in school	2.63	2.45
Student feelings of relatedness		
With teachers	2.72	2.65
With classmates	3.09	3.26
Student perceptions of autonomy and engagement		
Autonomy	3.26	3.29
Competence	3.17	3.48
Reaction to a school-based challenge		
Internal	3.22	3.32
External	2.78	2.75
Affective engagement	2.38	2.38
Behavioral engagement	2.80	2.80
Sample size	197	253

(continued)

Table 5.2 (continued)

SOURCE: Project Transition Student Survey.

NOTES: See Table 5.1 for the statements included in each construct.

Sample sizes vary slightly for the survey measures because every respondent did not necessarily respond to each item.

Each construct is the average of responses to the individual questions. Possible responses to each question ranged from 'not at all true' to 'very true.' Each response was converted to a numeric value, with the higher number indicating a proacademic response. For example, for the statement 'I don't work very hard in school,' responses of 'not at all true' were given a value of 4 and 'very true' were given a value of 1.

Another method to assess students' responses defines students as engaged in school if their average ratings are above 3.5 and disengaged if their ratings are below 2.5. Using these criteria, only about 10 percent of students at Pulaski and Schlagle were engaged in school, as measured by ratings for behavioral engagement (calculations not shown). The proportions of students who were disengaged are 31 percent at Pulaski and 27 percent at Schlagle. Thus, although fewer than a third of the students were disengaged, the data indicate that most would not be classified as engaged either. In fact, the data presented in Table 5.2 suggest that there is room for improvement on most of the survey outcomes.

The final issue concerning the survey data is how to measure any improvement. One option for measuring the success of Project Transition is to compare average construct values, such as are shown in Table 5.2, for the pre-PT and PT groups. Another option is to compare the percentage of students in each group who reported "high" ratings, where high ratings are defined by the responses given by students who are engaged in school. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, Project Transition may have greater effects on students who are more vulnerable to school transitions. If Project Transition increases the ratings of less engaged students, it may not increase the percentage who score above the values given by highly engaged students but would instead increase the percentage who score above some lower threshold.

To account for these potential effects, survey outcomes for the impact analysis are defined in the following manner. First, average construct values are obtained for students in the pre-PT groups who were relatively less engaged in school, where engagement is measured by attendance rates. Previous research has found that attendance is a good measure of engagement; research conducted by IRRE indicates that students with high school attendance rates of less than 75 percent are at high risk for dropping out, students with attendance rates of 75 percent to 89 percent are at moderate risk for dropping out, and students with attendance rates of 89 percent or higher are at low risk of dropping out (Bridges and Connell, 1997). Thus, average construct values were calculated for survey respondents in the pre-PT groups who were not highly engaged, or those with 9th-grade attendance rates of less than 89 percent.

Second, survey outcomes are defined as the percentage of students whose average construct scores are above these values. For example, if less engaged students in the pre-PT group report an average construct score of 3.27 for perceived autonomy, the outcome for each 9th-grade group is defined as the percentage of students who scored above that value. A positive impact of Project Transition then is defined as an increase in the percentage of students who gave a rating *above* that provided by less engaged students, hereafter referred to as the percentage of students providing a high rating.

B. School Records

School records are the other primary data source used in the evaluation. These records were provided by the Milwaukee and Kansas City public school systems and contain 8th- and 9th-grade data for all students who attended 9th grade within the district during the evaluation years. The records contain information on the student's demographic characteristics, such as race, sex, and age, and also on academic performance in 8th and 9th grades.

Key outcome data used from the school records are students' attendance rates during 9th grade, the number of disciplinary referrals, the number of credits earned, and GPA. Data on these academic outcomes for each 9th-grade class are presented in Chapter 6. Data on student characteristics used to regression-adjust the impact estimates are discussed in the following sections.

The sample of students used for the evaluation, or the *impact sample*, includes all non-repeating 9th graders who attended the Project Transition school at some point before March of their 9th-grade year. Because student mobility is fairly high, the impact samples for each cohort are larger than the numbers of students enrolled on any given day.[7] Both schools contain students who are repeating 9th grade, but these students were excluded from the analysis samples, since Project Transition is designed to affect students who are making the transition to high school from middle school.

Two additional exclusions were made for the Pulaski samples. First, students at Pulaski who were enrolled in its vocational education program (referred to as the SWIS program) are excluded from the samples because they did not take Project Transition classes. Second, a small number of students identified as "special education-mentally retarded" were excluded, since they were also not in Project Transition classes.[8]

Table 5.3 presents characteristics of each of the three 9th-grade groups at Pulaski. The characteristics of the pre-PT group (column 1) give an idea of what Pulaski was like before the Project Transition intervention. Half the students were black, about 8 percent were Hispanic, and the remaining 41 percent were of other races, mainly white. Consistent with the description of Pulaski in Chapter 3, the majority of the students (62 percent) qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, and on average the median income in the neighborhoods where the students live was approximately $23,000.[9]

The next several rows show that students who attend Pulaski come from many different feeder schools; no single middle school provides more than 9 percent of Pulaski's students. For those who attended middle school within the district, the bottom rows provide information on their performance in 8th grade.[10] Their average GPA was 1.98 (just below a C average) and they were absent about 11 percent of the time during their 8th-grade year. Also, a high percentage of the students were listed as having been suspended at some point during 8th grade (42 percent).

Thus, data for the pre-PT group, or the group of first-time 9th graders in the 1994-95 year, suggest that Pulaski fits the profile of a school in which Project Transition might be effec-

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[7]The high school mobility rate also suggests that some students received small "doses" of Project Transition. This issue is discussed in Chapter 6.

[8]The records data for Schlagle did not classify students by type of special education, so these students could not be excluded from the samples for this school.

[9]The income estimate is from the 1990 Census and is an average of the median family incomes in 1990 in the census tracts in which the students live.

[10]No 8th-grade information is available for students who attended 8th grade outside the district's public school system. These students represent 23 percent of the pre-PT sample at Pulaski and 8 percent at Schlagle. These students are included in the impact analyses, and the regression-adjustment model includes a variable indicating whether the 8th-grade information is available for each student.

Table 5.3

Characteristics of Project Transition Students in the Comparison and Treatment Cohorts at Pulaski High School

Characteristic	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group
Sex (%)			
Female	48.5	40.5	50.0
Male	51.5	59.9	50.0
Race/ethnicity (%)			
Black	50.8	48.6	25.9 ***
Hispanic	7.9	15.1	30.0 ***
White[a]	41.3	36.3	44.1 *
Other			
Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (%)	62.2	58.6	63.5
Median family income in Census tract of residence ($)	22,743	22,967	23,503
Age at start of 9th grade (years)	15.0	15.1	15.0 **
Percentage of students from feeder middle school			
1	8.7	7.0	10.8
2	3.8	4.7	3.2
3	5.6	3.3	0.5 ***
4	3.1	4.7	2.0 *
5	2.6	4.9	12.2 ***
6	4.6	2.8	1.8 *
7	8.9	7.9	14.0 **
8	5.1	7.0	7.7
Other middle schools in district	27.0	28.1	23.0
Alternative schools	7.7	4.7	8.1 *
Schools out of district	23.0	25.1	16.9 **
8th-grade performance			
GPA	1.98	1.90	2.13 **
Absence rate (%)	10.7	12.0	9.9 *
Ever suspended (%)	41.9	52.0	42.7 **
Tardy rate (%)	4.0	4.9	4.8
Percentage of special education students	9.9	13.4	14.1
Sample size	392	430	444

(continued)

Table 5.3 (continued)

SOURCES: Student records from the Milwaukee Public Schools and the 1990 Census.

NOTES: Significance levels for the difference between the pre-PT group and PT-2 group are shown in the last column.

Statistical significance levels are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

[a] This category includes a small percentage of students classified as Asian (4.9%), American Indian (1.7%), and "other" (0.7%).

tive. The students come from relatively low-income backgrounds; they are academically at-risk, as shown by their relatively weak performance in 8th grade; and they come to Pulaski from many different feeder schools.

A look across the columns of Table 5.3 shows that the PT groups differed in several ways from the pre-PT group. The last column marks with asterisks those differences in characteristics between the pre-PT and PT-2 groups that are statistically significant. The first difference between the groups is seen in row 1, in which girls made up only 41 percent of the PT-1 group compared with 50 percent of the other two groups. This difference is not due to a change in the number of girls attending Pulaski but rather to a change in the SWIS program during that year, in which an office skills component was introduced. Thus, some girls who would have been in the Project Transition program that year instead were enrolled in the SWIS program. The office skills component of SWIS was not continued for the 1996-97 year, which explains why the difference in the percentage of females exists only for the PT-1 group.

The most notable difference between the groups, however, is in the racial-ethnic composition of the students. Black students made up 51 percent of the pre-PT group and only 26 percent of the PT-2 group. Also, the percentage of students who are Hispanic increased from 8 percent to 30 percent. These differences are the result of two changes within the district. First, before the 1996-97 school year, nonblack students could attend Pulaski only if they lived within Pulaski's attendance area. This policy was changed for the 1996-97 school year, when Pulaski began accepting applications from nonblack students from all areas of the city. Second, another high school in the area was reorganized, and many parents whose children would have attended this school opted instead to send their children to Pulaski. The high school that underwent the reorganization served a largely Hispanic student body.

As mentioned in the methodology section, an important assumption underlying the cohort-comparison design is that similar types of students enter the school each year. The data shown in Table 5.3 illustrate that this was not the case at Pulaski, particularly for the PT-2 group. Fewer students in the PT-2 group, compared with the pre-PT group, were black, and more were Hispanic. In addition, the students in the PT-2 group represent a different mix of middle school feeder schools, as shown in the rows listing the percentage of students from different middle schools.

Perhaps most important, however, the students in the PT-2 group appear to be higher achieving than those in the pre-PT group; the average 8th-grade GPA for those in the PT-2 group was 2.13, compared with 1.98 for the pre-PT group. This difference suggests that 9th-grade academic achievement might also be higher for the PT-2 group. Thus, measuring the effects of Project Transition by comparing 9th-grade outcomes for the two groups attributes any difference in their achievement to Project Transition, when some or all the effects may be due to the fact that the PT-2 group was composed of higher-achieving students.

The data from Pulaski highlight the importance of regression-adjusting the impact estimates for differences between the groups. The regression-adjustment procedure uses all the information listed in Table 5.3; in other words, any differences in 9th-grade outcomes between the groups that are due to these characteristics are parceled out of the estimates, with any remaining

difference thought to be due to Project Transition. However, one limitation of regression adjustment in this context is that it can only adjust for factors observable to the analyst. Differences in unobservable factors, such as motivation, may be important given the systematic differences between the two groups. Thus, the effects of Project Transition estimated using the PT-2 group must be qualified; the data in Table 5.3 suggest that the estimated impacts may be biased upward.

Table 5.4 presents characteristics of the students at Schlagle.[11] The majority of students at Schlagle are black (77 percent of the pre-PT group), and very few are Hispanic. In contrast to Pulaski, most of the students who attend Schlagle come from three middle schools, suggesting that they already know many of their classmates at the beginning of 9th grade.

The average GPA for the pre-PT group at Schlagle is 2.44, considerably higher than that for Pulaski's pre-PT students. In addition, Schlagle students have a slightly lower 8th-grade absence rate than Pulaski students. Information on 8th-grade standardized test scores is also available for Schlagle students. Average scores, reported in national percentiles, for the MAT7 total reading and total math tests are presented in the last rows of Table 5.4. Schlagle students scored in the bottom third nationally on these two tests.

IV. The Model Revisited

The model discussed earlier outlines several specific avenues through which Project Transition is hypothesized to affect student outcomes. It seems necessary, then, that for Project Transition to work, the model should fit — that is, the model should be an accurate representation of — how students become engaged in school. For example, do students with better relationships with their teachers feel more competent academically, and is student engagement associated with attendance and grades? Appendix A presents a brief analysis of the relationships among each of the outcomes. In short, the analysis indicates that the model fits the data. For example, students who report better relations with teachers and peers are also more likely to report high values for autonomy and competence. High values of autonomy and competence are associated with being engaged in school. Finally, engagement in school is associated with higher attendance rates and higher grades. Thus, the model works. The next question is whether Project Transition did.

[11]The information presented for each school differs because of differences in the types of data available.

Table 5.4

Characteristics of Project Transition Students in the Comparison and Treatment Cohorts at Schlagle High School

Characteristic	Pre-PT Group	PT Group
Sex (%)		
Female	48.0	43.7
Male	52.0	56.3
Race/Ethnicity (%)		
Black	76.9	72.3
Hispanic	2.0	1.6
White[a]	21.1	26.1 *
Other		
From zipcode 1	55.0	50.1
From zipcode 2	26.9	29.7
From all other zipcodes	18.1	20.1
Age at start of 9th grade (years)	14.8	14.9 **
Percentage of students from feeder middle school		
1	24.9	24.0
2	23.6	24.7
3	13.8	11.2
4	8.3	6.9
Other middle schools in district	21.6	18.3
Schools out of district	7.8	14.9 **
8th-grade performance		
GPA	2.44	2.27 **
Absence rate (%)	9.2	8.6
Changed schools during year (%)	13.4	9.7
Reading percentile score (%)	27.3	26.6
Math percentile score (%)	28.0	27.9
Percentage of special education students	10.4	11.6
Sample size	398	437

SOURCE: Student records from the Kansas City Public Schools.

NOTE: Significance levels for the difference between the pre-PT and PT groups are shown in the last column.

Statistical significance levels are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

[a] This category includes a small percentage of students classified as Asian (1.1%), American Indian (0.1%), and "other" (0.1%).

Chapter 6

Project Transition's Effects on Student Outcomes

I. Introduction

This chapter presents estimates of Project Transition's effects on 9th graders in their first year of the transition to high school. It examines whether Project Transition improved students' relationships with their classmates and their teachers, whether it increased their feelings of academic competence and engagement in school, and whether it improved their educational outcomes, such as attendance and grades.

II. Findings in Brief

The results indicate that the program had different effects in the two schools. At Pulaski, Project Transition improved the quality of students' relationships with their peers but produced no impacts on any other student outcomes. In contrast, at Schlagle, Project Transition improved students' relationships with their teachers, increased students' feelings of autonomy in school, and increased their reported engagement in school. It also resulted in a small increase in the rate at which students passed their courses, increasing their average number of credits earned. The increase in credits earned was observed largely among students who were relatively at-risk for school failure.

The increase in credits earned for these students, however, was fairly small. In addition, at neither school did Project Transition increase attendance rates or average GPA. There is some evidence that it increased attendance for a subset of students at Schlagle, but these effects were not large. Attendance in 9th grade, in particular, is a key outcome variable in the Project Transition model, since it is an important determinant of high school completion.

The results presented here are subject to three caveats. First, as discussed earlier, the notable change in the characteristics of students who attend Pulaski poses a problem for the cohort comparison design used to evaluate Project Transition and suggests that the impacts may be biased upward. Although statistical methods are used to account for a range of student characteristics, the results for this school should be interpreted with some caution. The second caveat is that this evaluation follows students only through the end of 9th grade. It is possible that Project Transition, having changed the environment in 9th grade, will have affects on students that extend beyond that year. Finally, the impacts were measured when the intervention had been fully in place for one year at both schools. The results cannot be taken to represent those of fully mature initiatives.

III. The Fall in Performance from 8th Grade to 9th Grade

As discussed in Chapter 1, the difficulty many students face in making the transition to high school is evidenced by the fall in their academic performance and attendance during the 9th grade. Previous research found that students' average GPAs fall by more than half a letter grade

from 8th grade to 9th grade and their rate of absenteeism increases (Felner, Primavera, and Cauce, 1981).

Table 6.1 presents a similar analysis for the students in the pre-PT groups at Pulaski and Schlagle. The data for these schools are consistent with previous research. They also suggest that students at Pulaski have more difficulty making the transition than their counterparts at Schlagle. The fall in average GPA for students at Pulaski was .70, while that for students at Schlagle was .41. The rate of absenteeism increased dramatically for students at Pulaski (by 21 percentage points) and much less for students at Schlagle (6 percentage points).[1]

The next rows present changes in performance for several subgroups. At Pulaski, there were no significant differences between girls and boys or between black and nonblack students in their average change in GPA. However, black students at Pulaski showed much bigger increases in absenteeism than students of other races, and the increase for boys was also larger than that for girls. For example, the average absence rate for black students increased from 12.2 percent to 38.5 percent, for a change of 26.3 percentage points, compared with a change of 15.7 percentage points for students of other races.[2] At Schlagle, black students, compared with students of other races, and boys, compared with girls, experienced slightly larger changes in GPA, but these differences are not statistically significant. There are no substantial differences across the groups at Schlagle in changes in absenteeism.

The final two rows of each panel present data for subgroups based on attendance during 8th grade. Previous research indicates that attendance in both middle school and high school is an important predictor of whether a student will drop out of high school. Students with attendance rates in middle school of less than 93 percent were found to be at moderate to high risk of dropping out, and students with attendance rates of 93 percent or higher were found to be at low risk (Bridges and Connell, 1997). Changes in GPA and attendance are presented for these two groups. The data suggest, not surprisingly, that at-risk students are more vulnerable to school transitions. At both schools, the rate of absenteeism increased in 9th grade more for the at-risk group than for the low-risk group (23.8 percent versus 18.4 percent at Pulaski and 9.4 percent versus 3.7 percent at Schlagle). Also, at Schlagle the decrease in average GPA was larger for the at-risk group. At Pulaski, the at-risk group experienced a smaller decrease in GPA than the low-risk group, probably because the average 8th-grade GPA for the former was already quite low (1.60), so that large decreases were not possible.

IV. The Effects of Project Transition

The data in Table 6.1 clearly illustrate the need for an intervention like Project Transition. Students' engagement and academic performance decrease as they move from 8th to 9th grade, and the primary objective of the intervention is to stem this fall in performance. This section presents Project Transition's effects on student outcomes. The discussion of impacts is ordered according to the model outlined in the previous chapter.

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[1]Average GPAs presented in Table 6.1 will not equal those shown in Tables 5.3 and 5.4, because the sample in Table 6.1 is restricted to those students with information on both 8th- and 9th-grade GPAs.

[2]These differences by race and sex are statistically significant at the 10 percent level.

Table 6.1

Change in Performance from 8th to 9th Grade for Pre-Project Transition Groups

Performance	Pulaski High School			Schlagle High School		
	8th Grade	9th Grade	Change	8th Grade	9th Grade	Change
GPA						
All students	2.02	1.32	-0.70	2.47	2.06	-0.41
Female	2.28	1.56	-0.72	2.67	2.30	-0.37
Male	1.79	1.11	-0.68	2.28	1.83	-0.45
Black	1.79	1.06	-0.73	2.44	2.02	-0.42
Other	2.22	1.54	-0.67	2.59	2.24	-0.35
Moderate- to high-risk group	1.60	0.95	-0.65	1.81	1.31	-0.51
Low-risk group	2.44	1.71	-0.73	2.83	2.47	-0.36
Absence rate (%)						
All students	10.6	31.9	21.3	9.0	14.8	5.8
Female	11.1	28.6	17.6 **	8.6	14.4	5.8
Male	10.3	34.7	24.4	9.5	15.2	5.7
Black	12.2	38.5	26.3 ***	8.9	13.9	5.0
Other	8.9	24.6	15.7	9.5	17.9	8.4
Moderate- to high-risk group	17.3	41.1	23.8	19.0	28.4	9.4 ***
Low-risk group	3.1	21.5	18.4	3.3	7.0	3.7

SOURCES: Student records from the Milwaukee and Kansas City Public Schools.

NOTES: The moderate- to high-risk group contains students with 8th-grade attendance rates of less than 93 percent. The low-risk group contains students with 8th-grade attendance rates of 93 percent or higher.

Change in performance was computed for students with available data for both 8th and 9th grades. At Pulaski High School 214 students had GPA data in 8th and 9th grades, and 233 had absence data. At Schlagle High School, 335 had GPA data for 8th and 9th grades, and 354 had absence data.

Differences between the change in performance for subgroups (e.g., female versus male) are tested for statistical significance. Statistical significance levels are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

A. Students' Relationships

Table 6.2 presents impacts on students' perceptions of their relationships with teachers and classmates. Recall that survey outcomes are the percentage of students providing a high rating for each construct, defined as a rating above the average value reported for a sample of less engaged students.[3]

The first several columns focus on the effects of Project Transition at Pulaski. Columns 1 through 3 present outcome levels for each of the three groups. The first row, for example, indicates that 49.5 percent of the students in the pre-PT group provided a high rating for teacher involvement. The next two columns provide this percentage for each of the PT groups.

The impact of Project Transition is measured as the difference in these outcomes.[4] Comparing the pre-PT group with the PT-1 group gives an estimate of 0.7 (column 4), indicating that Project Transition resulted in an increase of 0.7 percentage points in the percentage of students providing a high rating on teacher involvement. This impact, however, is not statistically significant. The impact calculated by comparing the PT-2 group to the pre-PT group (-3.0 percentage points) is also not statistically significant. Thus, Project Transition at Pulaski produced no significant changes in students' perceptions of teacher involvement. The program did increase students' rating of teacher expectations, but this effect is not consistent across both PT groups. The other notable effect on measures of student-teacher relationships is a decrease in students' perception of teacher competence (55.0 for the pre-PT group compared with 46.3 percent for the PT-2 group, for a statistically significant impact of -8.7 percentage points).

In contrast to its effects on teacher support, Project Transition improved students' relationships at Pulaski. Comparing the pre-PT group and the PT-2 group, for example, Project Transition increased the percentage with high ratings on student support from 44.1 to 54.2 for a statistically significant impact of 10.1 percentage points. It also increased the extent to which students felt that they knew other students and reduced the extent to which they felt that other students were biased against them (affirmation of identity). Project Transition also increased students' feelings of proacademic behavior, as shown by the positive impacts on the two peer-culture constructs (10.5 and 10.7, respectively).

In sum, Project Transition at Pulaski produced no consistent changes in students' relationships with their teachers but did improve their relationships with peers. The changes in student-student relationships, however, did not carry through toward students' feelings of relatedness. As shown in the bottom two rows of the table, the percentage of students providing high ratings on relatedness to classmates increased from 49.3 percent for the pre-PT group to 51.6 percent for the PT-2 group, but the difference is small and not statistically significant. A look at the statements that make up these relatedness constructs (see Table 5.1) suggests that they may be more difficult to change than the others; that is, it may require a more dramatic change in student-student rela-

[3]The results were not sensitive to how the survey outcomes were defined. The results presented in the table, using the responses of less engaged students to determine a high rating, were very similar to those obtained using construct averages as the outcomes or using the responses of highly engaged students to determine a high rating.

[4]Recall that regression adjustment modifies the outcome levels for each group so that the correct impacts can be estimated. The unadjusted outcomes and impacts are presented in Appendix C. The regression-adjustment model for one outcome is shown in Appendix D.

Table 6.2

Project Transition Impacts on Students' Relationships with Teachers and Classmates

Measure (%)	Pulaski High School					Schlagle High School		
	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT Group
Student perceptions of teachers								
Involvement	49.5	50.2	46.5	0.7	-3.0	49.0	58.7	9.7 **
Support/fairness	48.5	50.3	50.0	1.7	1.5	48.3	47.4	-0.9
Expectations	41.3	55.3	48.0	14.0 ***	6.7	55.1	70.5	15.4 ***
Competence	55.0	58.8	46.3	3.8	-8.7 *	64.5	73.7	9.2 **
Student perceptions of classmates								
Support	44.1	47.1	54.2	3.0	10.1 *	28.8	36.8	8.1 *
Familiarity	59.9	64.2	72.3	4.3	12.4 **	66.1	64.2	-1.9
Affirmation of identity	48.0	50.8	56.9	2.8	8.9 *	54.2	42.6	-11.6 ***
Student perceptions of the best way to get respect								
To be nondisruptive	58.0	63.7	68.5	5.6	10.5 **	42.6	36.9	-5.7
To work hard in school	53.9	58.7	64.6	4.8	10.7 **	45.2	53.9	8.7 *

(continued)

Table 6.2 (continued)

Measure (%)	Pulaski High School					Schlagle High School		
	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT Group
Student feelings of relatedness								
With teachers	49.8	53.3	48.8	3.5	-1.0	59.4	67.0	7.6 *
With classmates	49.3	54.4	51.6	5.1	2.3	58.1	55.0	-3.1
Sample size	197	194	224			253	272	

SOURCE: Project Transition Student Survey.

NOTES: See Table 5.1 for the statements included in each construct.

Survey outcomes are defined as the percentage of students providing a high rating for the given construct. A high rating is one that is above the average response given by less engaged students, where less engaged students are those with attendance rates in 9th grade of less than 89 percent. All impacts for each school are regression-adjusted using the baseline characteristics listed in Tables 5.3 and 5.4.

Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

Sample sizes vary slightly for the survey measures because every respondent did not necessarily respond to each item.

tionships to increase the number of students who report feeling happy when they are with classmates.

The last three columns present outcomes and impacts for Schlagle. In contrast to Pulaski, Project Transition at Schlagle improved students' relationships with teachers. For teacher involvement, 49.0 percent of pre-PT students gave high responses, compared with 58.7 percent of PT students, for a statistically significant impact of 9.7 percentage points. Project Transition also produced a fairly substantial impact on students' perception of teacher expectations; the percentage providing a high rating increased from 55.1 percent to 70.5 percent.

In a somewhat odd pattern of results, the program increased students' feeling of student support but reduced ratings on affirmation of identity. An examination of the individual statements that make up the constructs (Table 5.1) reveals that the increase in ratings on student support came from an increase in the extent to which students helped each other with school work ("Students in class help me with my school work") and their performance in school. Thus, some aspect of the intervention may have increased the extent to which students worked in groups but did not improve their relationships. The decrease in high ratings for affirmation of identity, from 54.2 percent to 42.6 percent, is consistent with focus-group findings that students at Schlagle disliked traveling together (see Chapter 4). Project Transition produced no impacts on the construct measuring student familiarity, probably because many of the students already knew each other; as shown in the previous chapter, nearly 70 percent of Schlagle's students come from four middle schools.

The next to last row of the table indicates that Project Transition's effects on student-teacher relationships carried through to students' feelings of relatedness to their teachers; 67 percent of the PT group gave high ratings for this construct, compared with 59.4 percent of the pre-PT group, for a statistically significant impact of 7.6 percentage points. There was no significant impact on students' reports of relatedness to their peers (last row).

B. Students' Self-Perceptions and Engagement in School

Table 6.3 presents Project Transition's effects on students' perceptions of themselves and their engagement in school. The first four outcomes measure students' feelings of control over their academic success, and the final two measure engagement in school. Both types of outcomes have been found to be important predictors of academic performance.

A look at columns 4 and 5 shows that in general Project Transition produced no significant impacts on these measures at Pulaski. For example, 56.8 percent of students in the pre-PT group gave high ratings for perceived autonomy compared with 62.3 percent of students in the PT-2 group. The difference of 5.5 percentage points is not statistically significant. The one exception to the lack of impacts is the negative impact for the PT-1 group on reaction to challenge-external. This impact is not significant, however, for the PT-2 group. Ratings on the two engagement measures (affective and behavioral) were generally higher for students in the PT-2 group, compared with the pre-PT group, but neither difference is statistically significant.

At Schlagle, Project Transition increased ratings on perceived autonomy and reduced the extent to which students attributed problems in school to external factors (reaction to challenge-external); 60.4 percent of pre-PT students reported a high rating for reaction to challenge-external, compared with 69.3 percent of PT students, for a statistically significant impact of 8.9

Table 6.3

Project Transition Impacts on Students' Self-Perceptions and Engagement in School

Measure (%)	Pulaski High School					Schlagle High School		
	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT Group
Perceived autonomy	56.8	63.2	62.3	6.3	5.5	58.1	67.1	9.0 **
Perceived competence	58.8	57.2	58.6	-1.6	-0.2	67.2	63.6	-3.5
Reaction to a school-based challenge								
Internal	56.8	60.3	60.4	3.5	3.6	61.7	65.5	3.8
External	52.9	39.7	44.6	-13.2 **	-8.3	60.4	69.3	8.9 **
Affective engagement	62.0	57.8	65.9	-4.2	4.0	61.3	61.6	0.2
Behavioral engagement	60.2	55.6	61.9	-4.6	1.7	60.1	66.9	6.9
Sample size	197	194	224			253	272	

SOURCE: Project Transition Student Survey.

NOTES: See Table 5.1 for the statements included in each construct.

Survey outcomes are defined as the percentage of students providing a high rating for the given construct. A high rating is one that is above the average response given by less engaged students, where less engaged students are those with attendance rates in 9th grade of less than 89 percent.

All impacts for each school are regression-adjusted using the baseline characteristics listed in Tables 5.3 and 5.4.

Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

Sample sizes vary slightly for the survey measures because every respondent did not necessarily respond to each item.

percentage points.[5] Although neither impact on the engagement measures is statistically significant, the increase in behavioral engagement, from 60.1 to 66.9, just misses achieving statistical significance at the 10 percent level.

Thus, impacts from the student surveys show different results at the two schools. Project Transition did not improve students' relationships with teachers at Pulaski but did at Schlagle, and more students at Schlagle reported feeling good when with their teachers. Project Transition most consistently improved peer relationships at Pulaski, increasing student familiarity, support, and affirmation of identify. At Schlagle, in contrast, where more of the students probably already knew each other, the intervention did not improve, and may have even reduced, the quality of student relationships. In neither school did more students report feeling good when with their peers. Finally, only at Schlagle did Project Transition affect students' perceptions of autonomy and their engagement in school.

C. Attendance and Discipline

The pattern of effects presented in the previous section suggests that Project Transition might improve what are termed the ultimate school outcomes, such as attendance and grades. At Pulaski, these effects might be realized because of a change in students' feelings of peer support and at Schlagle because of a change in students' feelings of teacher support and their feelings of autonomy and engagement.

Table 6.4 presents outcomes and impacts for attendance and discipline during the 9th grade.[6] The first two rows present data on absenteeism: the absence rate (defined as total days absent divided by total days enrolled) and the percentage of students missing 20 or more days during the year. Table 6.1 showed that the absence rate increased much more dramatically between 8th and 9th grades for students at Pulaski than at Schlagle. That difference is apparent in Table 6.4 by the much higher absence rate for Pulaski's pre-PT group (30.9 percent for Pulaski compared with 16.6 percent for Schlagle).

Despite the fairly high absence rates, the impact columns, measuring the differences between the PT and pre-PT groups, show that Project Transition did not reduce absenteeism. For example, the absence rate for the pre-PT group at Schlagle was 16.6 percent, compared with 15.3 percent for the PT group, for a statistically insignificant impact of -1.3 percentage points.

The next two rows present information on the number of students who dropped out during the year, available only for Schlagle. School records identify students who withdrew from school and the withdrawal reason, such as "transferred to another school" or "dropped out." For those who dropped out, the reason for dropout is also specified, such as suspension, lack of attendance, pregnancy, or work. The first dropout rate (row 3) is defined using all students who were listed as having dropped out for any reason. The second dropout rate excludes those who dropped out due to suspension. Since suspension is involuntary, although the behavior leading to

[5]Recall that numeric values were assigned to the survey statements such that a higher number indicates a proacademic response. Thus, an increase in ratings for reaction to challenge-external implies a reduction in the extent to which students blame school problems on external factors.

[6]The 9th-grade averages in this section will not match data presented in Table 6.1, because the former are regression-adjusted, and the averages in Table 6.1 are calculated only for students with 8th-grade information.

Table 6.4

Project Transition Impacts on Attendance and Discipline

Measure	Pulaski High School					Schlagle High School		
	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT Group
Attendance (%)								
Absence rate	30.9	30.3	29.7	-0.6	-1.3	16.6	15.3	-1.3
Percentage of students absent 20 or more days	61.8	60.3	58.9	-1.5	-2.8	33.7	34.3	0.5
Percentage reported as dropped out (including suspensions)						5.7	7.4	1.6
Percentage reported as dropped out (excluding suspensions)						4.3	4.1	-0.3
Discipline/suspensions								
Number of suspension referrals								
None						33.6	41.0	7.5 **
1 to 3						29.4	38.4	9.0 ***
4 or more						37.0	20.5	-16.5 ***
Percentage ever suspended						29.0	46.6	17.6 ***
Sample size[a]	391	425	435			398	437	

SOURCES: Student records from the Milwaukee and Kansas City Public Schools.

NOTES: Student records on dropout rates and discipline levels are not available for Pulaski High School.
All impacts for each school are regression-adjusted using the baseline characteristics listed in Tables 5.3 and 5.4.
Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.
[a]For Schlagle High School, sample sizes for absence measures vary slightly.

it is not, the second dropout rate might better measure the rate of dropping out due to lack of interest in school. The data indicate that very few students in the pre-PT group were listed as having dropped out (5.7 percent including suspensions and 4.3 percent excluding suspensions). Project Transition produced no significant effect on either of these outcomes.

The bottom rows of Table 6.4 present information for Schlagle on suspension referrals and suspensions during the 9th grade. For the pre-PT group, the numbers show that 33.6 percent of the students in this group had no suspension referrals, 29.4 percent had between one and three referrals, and 37 percent had more than three referrals. A look at the impact column shows that Project Transition reduced the number of referrals. The program increased the percentage of students with no referrals (by 7.5 percentage points) and reduced the percentage who had more than three referrals (by 16.5 percentage points). This pattern of impacts is consistent with findings from field research that teachers at Schlagle perceived the PT students to be better behaved than their pre-PT counterparts.

Although Project Transition reduced the number of suspension referrals, the percentage of students who were listed as suspended at some point during the year was higher for the PT group. Thus, it appears that once a student in the PT group was referred for suspension, she was more likely to be suspended. This pattern of impacts could result if, for the PT group, only the more serious behavior problems were referred for suspension.

D. Credits Earned and Grades

Table 6.5 presents outcomes and impacts on credits earned and average grades during 9th grade.[7] The top row shows that average credits earned during the year were significantly higher for pre-PT students at Schlagle than at Pulaski (5.21 versus 3.56). Schlagle students also had higher average GPAs (1.92 versus 1.32).

Differences between the PT and pre-PT groups suggest that Project Transition increased credits earned in both schools. On average, Pulaski students in the PT-2 group earned one-quarter of a credit more than pre-PT counterparts (.27 credits), while PT students at Schlagle earned over a third of a credit more (.37 credits). At Pulaski, however, the increase in credits earned is due to an increase in average credits attempted. Before the 1996-97 school year, many students enrolled in one period of study hall each semester, for which they did not earn credits. At the start of 1996-97, students were encouraged to take credit-conferring courses instead of study hall. As a result, the average number of credits attempted increased for the PT-2 group.

To control for the possibility that credits attempted may have been higher for the PT groups, the next outcome is defined as credits earned as a percentage of credits attempted. The impacts show that the rate of passing classes was not significantly higher for the PT-2 group at Pulaski, but it was higher for the PT group at Schlagle (81.4 versus 77.1, for a statistically significant impact of 4.3 percentage points). Thus, the increase in credits earned at Pulaski appears to have been the result of the change in school policy regarding study hall and not due to Project

[7]Because records data are available for students within the school district, students who leave the district during the year are not included in analyses of credits earned and grades. In each year, at both Pulaski and Schlagle, about 7 percent of students transferred to an out-of-district school.

Table 6.5

Project Transition Impacts on Credits Earned and Grades

Measure	Pulaski High School					Schlagle High School		
	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT Group
Credits								
Number of credits earned	3.56	3.57	3.83	0.01	0.27 *	5.21	5.59	0.37 ***
Percentage of courses passed[a]	60.1	58.7	63.0	-1.5	2.9	77.1	81.4	4.3 **
Sample size	359	382	404			366	379	
Grades								
GPA	1.32	1.35	1.38	0.03	0.06	1.92	1.95	0.04
Percentage with GPA greater than 2.0	27.3	30.8	31.0	3.5	3.8	49.7	48.1	-1.6
Percentage with GPA greater than 1.0	58.3	52.2	57.1	-6.0 *	-1.2	74.5	80.7	6.2 **
Sample size	359	382	404			368	395	

SOURCES: Student records from the Milwaukee and Kansas City Public Schools.

NOTES: All impacts for each school are regression-adjusted using the baseline characteristics listed in Tables 5.3 and 5.4.
Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.
[a]Percentage of courses passed is equal to credits earned divided by credits attempted.

Transition per se. At Schlagle, in contrast, the increase in credits earned is due to the fact that students in the PT group passed more of their courses.

The next several rows present impacts on various measure of grades earned during the 9th grade: average GPA, the percentage with a GPA higher than a C average, and the percentage with a GPA higher than a D average. The latter two measures are included to account for the possibility that Project Transition may affect students at different points in the GPA distribution without necessarily affecting the average GPA.

At Pulaski, Project Transition produced no effect on average grades earned. Although most of the differences are positive, indicating an increase in GPA for the PT groups, none is statistically significant. The exception is an oddly negative impact (a 6 percentage point reduction) for the PT-1 group on the percentage of students with a GPA higher than 1.0. This impact for the PT-2 group is not significant.

At Schlagle, Project Transition produced a small increase in average GPA, but this difference of 0.04 is not statistically significant. The program did increase the percentage of students earning a D or higher average; 74.5 percent of students in the pre-PT group earned above a 1.0, compared with 80.7 percent of students in the PT group, for a statistically significant impact of 6.2 percentage points. This impact at the bottom of the GPA distribution is consistent with the finding that PT students at Schlagle passed more of their courses.[8]

V. The Effects of Project Transition for At-Risk Students

Felner's research indicates that certain groups of students were especially vulnerable to school transitions (Felne, Primavera, and Cauce, 1981). This finding is consistent with data from Pulaski and Schlagle, in which at-risk students experienced bigger increases in absence rates than low-risk students (see Table 6.1). This section examines whether Project Transition had different effects on more vulnerable students.

Impacts are estimated for two groups of students — those defined to be at moderate to high risk for later dropout and those defined to be at low risk for later dropout. As for the analysis shown in Table 6.1, at-risk students are defined as those with attendance rates during 8th grade of less than 93 percent. The remaining students, with attendance rates of 93 percent or higher, make up the low-risk group.

Impacts for Pulaski are presented in Table 6.6.[9] The top panel of the table reports only those survey impacts that were found to be significantly different for the two groups. The first

[8]Changes in GPA might not be the best barometer of Project Transition's success, given that grading practices differ from teacher to teacher and the 9th-grade teachers changed from one year to the next. In addition, Project Transition might affect teachers' grading practices across the years, for example, if it causes them to expect more from their students. As an example, one PT teacher, who did not teach for the pre-PT Group, failed a significant fraction of her class. Impacts estimated for a measure of GPA excluding this subject were similar to those reported in the text.

[9]The risk subgroups are defined using middle school attendance, which is missing for some students. Because of this, the sample sizes for the two subgroups do not add to that of the full sample.

Table 6.6

Project Transition Impacts on Subgroups of Students at Pulaski High School

Measure	Moderate- to High-Risk Group					Low-Risk Group				
	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group
Survey impacts (%)										
Student perceptions of relatedness with teachers	55.1	55.0	37.3	-0.1	-17.8 *	48.8	51.3	53.2	2.5	4.3
Student perceptions of affective engagement	58.3	44.8	63.5	-13.5	5.2	56.3	64.8	67.1	8.5	10.8
Sample size	62	51	53			68	82	117		
Records impacts										
Credits earned	2.73	2.42	2.85	-0.31	0.12	4.56	4.74	4.69	0.18	0.13
Percentage of courses passed[a]	47.3	40.7	49.5	-6.6 *	2.2	73.3	76.0	74.2	2.8	0.9
GPA	0.90	0.76	0.91	-0.14	0.01	1.73	1.86	1.67	0.13	-0.06
Percentage with GPA greater than 1.0	45.0	29.9	41.7	-15.1 ***	-3.3	74.3	71.5	67.7	-2.8	-6.6
Sample size	116	148	151			104	118	166		
Attendance (%)										
Absence rate	40.9	44.3	41.0	-3.4	0.1	20.6	16.8	17.5	-3.8	-3.1
Sample size	124	162	160			109	128	174		

(continued)

Table 6.6 (continued)

SOURCES: Student records from the Milwaukee Public Schools and Project Transition Student Survey.

NOTES: The moderate- to high-risk group contains students with 8th-grade attendance rates of less than 93 percent. The low-risk group contains students with 8th-grade attendance rates of 93 percent or higher.

Survey outcomes are defined as the percentage of students providing a high rating for the given construct. A high rating is one that is above the average response given by less engaged students, where less engaged students are those with attendance rates in 9th grade of less than 89 percent.

All impacts for each school are regression-adjusted using the baseline characteristics listed in Tables 5.3 and 5.4.

Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

Sample sizes vary slightly for the survey measures because every respondent did not necessarily respond to each item.

[a]Percentage of courses passed is equal to credits earned divided by credits attempted.

row shows that although there was no significant impact on ratings of relatedness with teachers for the full sample (see Table 6.2), there was a significant negative impact on this construct for at-risk students; the percentage providing a high rating decreased from 55.1 for the pre-PT group to 37.3 for the PT-2 group. The other construct for which there is a difference between the groups is affective engagement. Comparing the pre-PT and PT-1 groups, the percentage giving high ratings for affective engagement fell by 13.5 percentage points (column 4). Although this impact is not statistically significant, it is significantly different from the impact of 8.5 for the low-risk group.

The middle panel presents impacts on several outcomes from the school records data. A comparison of the outcome levels for the pre-PT groups across the two panels reveals, not surprisingly, that the at-risk group earned fewer credits during their 9th-grade year and had substantially lower GPAs. In the pre-PT group, for example, at-risk students earned on average 2.73 credits during the year compared with 4.56 credits for low-risk students. Impacts measured by comparing the pre-PT group and the PT-1 group show a negative effect for the at-risk group on the credits earned as a fraction of credits attempted. In addition, Project Transition reduced the percentage of at-risk students with a GPA greater than 1.0 (45 percent for the pre-PT group compared with 29.9 percent for the PT-1 group).

A look at the impacts for the two groups shows that the negative impact of Project Transition for the full sample on the percentage of students with a D or higher average (see Table 6.5) is due entirely to its effect on at-risk students. It is not clear why so many of the at-risk students in the PT-1 group failed courses, but this impact is consistent with, and may have been associated with, the decrease in affective engagement for this group described earlier. These impacts on the rate of passing classes do not exist for the PT-2 group, however: Students in the PT-2 group earned 49.5 percent of credits attempted, compared with 47.3 percent for the pre-PT group.

Impacts for Schlagle are shown in Table 6.7. Project Transition at Schlagle seems to have had more effect on lower-performing students than on their higher-performing counterparts. The increase in the percentage of students giving high ratings on relatedness-teachers is due entirely to the change for the at-risk group; the positive impact on this construct is 39.7 percentage points for the at-risk group, compared with -0.5 percentage points for the low-risk group. The other notable difference on the survey outcomes is for student support. Ratings for this construct increased only for low-risk students.

The second and third panels present impacts on school records outcomes. The increase in credits earned is substantially bigger for the at-risk group (.70), compared with the low-risk group (.24).[10] In addition, the increase in credits earned for the low-risk group is due to the fact that low-risk students in the PT group attempted more credits than their pre-PT counterparts. This can be seen by the fact that the impact on credits earned divided by credits attempted is not statistically significant for this group.

For the at-risk group, however, Project Transition increased the rate at which they passed courses, as shown by the statistically significant impact of 9.6 percentage points on credits earned divided by credits attempted. This change is also consistent with the positive impact on

[10]The difference in impacts on credits earned for the two groups is statistically significant.

Table 6.7

Project Transition Impacts on Subgroups of Students at Schlagle High School

Measure	Moderate- to High-Risk Group			Low-Risk Group		
	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT Group	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT Group
Survey impacts (%)						
Student perceptions of relatedness with teachers	30.4	70.1	39.7 ***	65.0	64.5	-0.5
Student perceptions of classmate support	36.6	27.3	-9.2	27.8	39.9	12.1 **
Sample size	44	62		193	194	
Records impacts						
Credits earned	4.14	4.85	0.70 **	6.06	6.31	0.24 **
Percentage of courses passed[a]	60.6	70.2	9.6 **	89.1	91.2	2.1
Sample size	117	118		218	211	
GPA	1.27	1.37	0.10	2.36	2.40	0.04
Percentage with GPA greater than 1.0	54.1	64.2	10.1 *	90.7	91.8	1.1
Sample size	118	128		219	216	

(continued)

Table 6.7 (continued)

Measure	Moderate- to High-Risk Group			Low-Risk Group		
	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT Group	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT Group
Percentage reported as dropped out (including suspensions)	15.9	11.2	-4.8	1.0	2.1	1.1
Percentage reported as dropped out (excluding suspensions)	12.3	4.8	-7.5 **	1.0	1.2	0.1
Attendance (%)						
Absence rate	28.1	25.6	-2.5	7.4	6.5	-0.9
Sample size	132	143		230	225	

SOURCES: Student records from the Kansas City Public Schools and Project Transition Student Survey.

NOTES: The moderate- to high-risk group contains students with 8th-grade attendance rates of less than 93 percent. The low-risk group contains students with 8th-grade attendance rates of 93 percent or higher.

Survey outcomes are defined as the percentage of students providing a high rating for the given construct. A high rating is one that is above the average response given by less engaged students, where less engaged students are those with attendance rates in 9th grade of less than 89 percent.

All impacts for each school are regression-adjusted using the baseline characteristics listed in Tables 5.3 and 5.4.

Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

Sample sizes vary slightly for the survey measures because every respondent did not necessarily respond to each item.

[a]Percentage of courses passed is equal to credits earned divided by credits attempted.

the percentage of the at-risk students earning a GPA higher than 1.0 (54.1 percent of the pre-PT group, compared with 64.2 percent of the PT group, for an impact of 10.1 percentage points). Thus, the effects of Project Transition for the full sample (shown in Table 6.5) derive primarily from positive effects on the rate at which at-risk students passed courses.[11]

Finally, although Project Transition did not affect the incidence of dropping out for the full sample, the last rows of Table 6.7 show that it did reduce the rate of dropping out for the at-risk group. Again, the first dropout rate includes all reasons for dropping out, while the second excludes suspensions. Project Transition did not reduce the incidence of dropping out overall but did reduce the rate of dropping out for nonsuspensions reasons; 12.3 percent of the pre-PT students dropped out, compared with 4.8 percent of PT students. An important caveat to this result is that during the 1995-96 school year, many of the pre-PT students who dropped out were assigned a reason of "unspecified." Although an analysis of the records data suggested that suspensions dropouts are accurately recorded, if some of these were incorrectly listed as "unspecified," then the rate of nonsuspension dropout would be overestimated for the pre-PT group.

The subgroup analyses indirectly address the issue that some students may have received small "doses" of Project Transition. In particular, some students in the impact samples may have attended Pulaski or Schlalge for only a few days or a few weeks before transferring to another school. Alternatively, they may have been enrolled in Pulaksi or Schlagle but rarely attended. Project Transition may have had little effect on these students, since they received very little of the program treatment. In this case, one might be interested in its effects on students who attended the Project Transition school for at least a certain number of days.

The low-risk group might be considered one such group, since these students had relatively high rates of attendance. As Tables 6.6 and 6.7 indicate, however, Project Transition did not have bigger effects on these students. In order to test the sensitivity of the results to the sample used, Appendix D presents impacts for several subgroups, including those defined by the "dose" of Project Transition they received. One sample definition, for example, is students who were enrolled in the Project Transition school for the entire school year. Impacts estimated for this subsample, representing about 70 percent of students in both schools, were no different from those presented for the full samples (see Appendix D). Another sample consists of students who were enrolled in the Project Transition school for the entire year and attended fairly regularly, thus receiving the largest dose of Project Transition. The results for this sample are generally similar to those for the full sample with the exception that the program produced a small decrease in the absence rate, less than 2 percentage points, for these students at Schlagle (see Appendix D).

VI. Conclusion

Project Transition had different effects in the two schools. At Pulaski, the only measur-

[11]Impacts were also estimated for the at-risk group, excluding those thought at be at high risk for dropping out or with 8th-grade attendance rates of less than 79 percent. The idea behind this analysis is that Project Transition may be most effective for students on the margin of dropping out but may have little effect on those who have become very disengaged before entering 9th grade. The results for this sample were similar to those for the full sample, with the exception of a small decrease in the absence rate (4 percentage points) for students at Schlagle.

able change produced by the intervention was an improvement in students' relationships with peers. At Schlagle, Project Transition improved students' relationships with teachers and increased their engagement in school. In addition, it produced a small increase in the number of credits earned by at-risk students. As suggested by the implementation research, the differences in impacts across the two schools may be related to the extent to which Project Transition was implemented in the schools, but they may also be due to the fact that the environments at Pulaski and Schlagle were very different to begin with.

What is common across the two schools is that Project Transition did not produce the substantive changes in students' academic performance that had originally been expected. First, at Schlagle the increase in credits earned was fairly small. Second, at neither school did Project Transition consistently increase attendance rates, and students who attend regularly are less likely to drop out later. This is particularly troubling for Pulaski, where the average student is absent nearly one out of every three days.

Despite the lack of notable impacts on academic performance and attendance, Project Transition does appear to have eased the transition to high school. This is suggested by the survey impacts and the implementation findings. The environment at both schools changed for the better, although maybe not enough.

Chapter 7

Learning and Doing

I. Introduction

The implementation of Project Transition marked MDRC's first effort to launch a demonstration program in a school. Not surprisingly, the process proved to be a learning experience for all concerned. The learning curve was perhaps steepest for MDRC, which, unlike Pulaski High School and Schlagle High School, had no prior history of efforts to initiate educational change.

This chapter reflects on the experiences of the parties to the demonstration and on the lessons learned. These reflections and lessons pertain both to the implementation of the Project Transition model and to its effects.

II. Implementing Project Transition and Explaining the Different Implementation Outcomes

Very different terms can be used to characterize and sum up the implementation of Project Transition in the two high schools, as Chapters 2 through Chapter 4 make clear. At Pulaski, implementation might aptly be described as *rushed* and *partial*. At Schlagle, the operative terms might be *considered* and *thorough*.

One point should be emphasized at the outset: Although implementation of the Project Transition model was less complete at Pulaski, the school's experience in implementing educational change was by no means atypical. The issues and obstacles that surfaced in Milwaukee are commonplace and well documented in the school reform literature. (Indeed, the relative ease with which the project was implemented at Schlagle may be far less typical of what usually happens when change is introduced into schools.) As often occurs when an innovation takes place, Pulaski did not so much reject that innovation as *adapt* it, so that at the conclusion of the demonstration, teachers and administrators preserved those elements of the Project Transition model they found valuable and discarded the others.

Moreover, while Pulaski did not progress so far as Schlagle in implementing the program model, personnel at the school were convinced that Project Transition was making a difference. Teachers felt less isolated because of it; administrators saw the teachers experimenting with new, project-based curricula and hands-on learning. In the view of Pulaski's principal, the school was not where it needed to be, but in a relatively short time, Project Transition helped it to move a considerable distance from where it had been. It may be that, having experienced some of the benefits of change, teachers involved in Project Transition will continue to make more changes and do so more quickly than in the past.

Two broad categories of explanations account for the substantial differences in process and results between the two schools: the preconditions existing at the two schools, and the cir-

cumstances and processes of implementation. In fact, it seems likely that both sets of factors, operating in conjunction with each other, came into play.

A. Different Initial Conditions

Schlagle entered the demonstration with two assets that Pulaski did not share. The first was Schlagle's assistant principal. It appears that she almost immediately came to share MDRC's vision of Project Transition as a key vehicle not only for improving student outcomes but also for improving teachers' classroom practices and addressing issues of student diversity. Her skills as a change agent proved critical in making this vision of the initiative a reality. In contrast, the principal and assistant principal at Pulaski, while generally supportive of Project Transition, did not see it as a critical modality of instructional change. (It should be added, however, that MDRC staff did not fully articulate this conception of the intervention when they introduced Project Transition at Pulaski and that MDRC's own thinking about the project and its potential evolved over time.)

Second, Schlagle benefited from the active involvement of a local foundation that had worked with the school district in implementing previous reforms. The foundation was critical in creating interest in and support for the project among school district officials.

An additional preexisting difference between the two schools — this one more conjectural than the first two — can also be considered. Teachers at Schlagle may have been more receptive generally to the kinds of changes contained in the Project Transition model than were Pulaski faculty members. For instance, Schlagle teachers may have been more willing to entertain the concept of shared scheduling, because student clusters had already been put in place with good results in two other high schools in the district. Pulaski teachers, in contrast, approached shared scheduling with mistrust. Some remembered negative experiences with clustering as middle school teachers, or they recalled Pulaski's only previous experience with the practice and the rowdy behavior of students assigned to the cluster. Furthermore, from the beginning, Schlagle teachers appeared more ready than their Pulaski counterparts to accept the notion that students' poor academic outcomes were a problem for which they were in some sense accountable and that they had the ability to affect. And the job description they prepared for the coach position explicitly included providing observation and feedback to team teachers as a chief responsibility — suggesting the teachers' willingness to hear such feedback.

B. Differences in Process: The Ingredients of Implementation Success

However promising initial conditions may be, implementing reform in schools is difficult. The varied results of the different implementation processes — whole-hearted adoption of the full Project Transition model in the case of Schlagle, selective adoption in that of Pulaski — suggest that a number of factors can facilitate the successful introduction of innovation in schools. None of the factors identified below is particularly original or surprising; all find ample support in the research literature. (See, e.g., Fullan, 1991.) But the Project Transition experience demonstrates and confirms the importance of some factors in promoting or impeding change.

The first factor is a *clear definition of both the problem the innovation is designed to remedy and how the innovation seeks to address that problem.* Project implementation at Schla-

gle benefited from MDRC's efforts over time to define the project and its components with greater precision. In contrast, MDRC staff did not engage Pulaski staff in a thorough discussion of the problems facing 9th graders at the school; thus, teachers never fully bought into the idea — central to the demonstration — that improvements in their classroom practices could affect students' attendance and performance. By most accounts, too, in describing Project Transition to administrators and teachers at Pulaski, MDRC staff members were fuzzy about operational details; such questions as the extent to which students should be scheduled for the same classes and what the resource support teachers' job entailed received vague answers. It seems likely that greater clarity about the former might have averted some antipathy toward shared scheduling that prevented this component of the model from being adopted during the demonstration's first year, while greater clarity about the latter might have engendered understanding of and support for the resource support teacher's actions.

A second requirement for successful implementation is *participant ownership of the innovation.* As noted in Chapter 3, the assistant principal at Schlagle was committed to introducing the project through a participatory process. Schlagle teachers were engaged early on in extensive discussions about all elements of the Project Transition model, and a quarter of the school's faculty signed up to participate on a planning committee. The members of this planning committee then became responsible for advocating for the project among the entire faculty; in so doing, they consolidated their own understanding and support of the project's goals and means.

At Pulaski, in contrast, the process was much more top-down. Teachers did not participate in a project steering committee, nor did they discuss at length the elements of the program model. There was little opportunity for Project Transition to develop a home-grown identity or for project teachers to see the model as their own.

All this suggests that *adequate planning time* is a critical ingredient, not a luxury. At Pulaski, the need to launch a complex project on a tight timetable in order to meet the demands of MDRC and its funders meant the short-circuiting of a more evolutionary process that might have resulted in a greater sense of ownership. As it was, Pulaski staff had about six months (excluding the summer break) to plan for the new demonstration; Schlagle personnel, in contrast, had about 14 months — three full semesters — to develop a shared vision of the initiative.

The experiences of the two sites further suggest that implementation benefits enormously from the *time and attention of key administrators*. The success of Project Transition's implementation at Schlagle is largely a testament to the commitment of the school's assistant principal. Playing an active role in change and instructional leadership, she dedicated an extraordinary amount of time to guiding the planning effort, and once the project was in operation, followed through by frequently attending teacher team meetings, joining the coach in observing project teachers in the classroom, and strongly supporting the coach's role. Her continuing attention to the project may have increased teachers' feelings of accountability for the success of the project and of their students.

The principal and assistant principal at Pulaski played active roles in the project's initial implementation, ongoing modification, and eventual continuation. From the beginning, though, they made it clear that they could devote only limited time to Project Transition. They reasoned

that it would not be feasible to tie up a major share of an administrator's time on an effort of relatively limited scale and that any initiative requiring a good deal of administrative oversight would not be widely replicable. Yet the literature on innovation and school effectiveness concludes that the active involvement of the principal (or, by extension, other key administrators) strongly influences the likelihood and the thoroughness of change. (See Berman and McLaughlin, 1977.)

The Schlagle experience further confirms the value of having *multiple respected change agents acting in concert.* The project benefited from the joint efforts of the assistant principal, the coach, and the staff member who represented the learning resource partner (the Learning Exchange). All three individuals were knowledgeable about the change process, and all were liked and respected by the Project Transition teachers. It is particularly notable that the three not only shared a common vision of the project but also were able to coordinate their activities successfully, with minimal dissension about areas of authority or responsibility. Indeed, the assistant principal's consistent support of the coach is likely to have increased the coach's standing and influence with the Project Transition teachers. At Pulaski, in contrast, there was little coordination of effort or message among the school's administrators, the resource support teacher, and the faculty member from Alverno, as well as some mutual distrust between the latter two parties.

Finally, the Schlagle coach was respected by the teachers because she combined *strong interpersonal skills with considerable susbstantive expertise.* The teachers valued the coach's deep familiarity with cooperative learning (even when, as the year progressed, they grew tired of her emphasis on this approach). Pulaski teachers, in contrast, felt they had little to learn from the resource support teacher about their subjects, about instructional techniques, or about working with each other.

There was, however, nothing inevitable about this outcome, as the post-Project Transition experiences of the Pulaski resource support teacher proved. When he took his next position with the Milwaukee Public Schools, again working with teachers needing improvement, he received specific training for the job. The training encompassed such topics as dealing with difficult people, using humor as an instructional device, and reducing stress. The resource support teacher argued strongly that had he received similar training before taking on his Project Transition responsibilities, he could have performed them more effectively.

As noted previously, the way in which these ingredients came together at Schlagle to promote effective implementation may be highly unusual; Pulaski's experience may well be the norm. And while some of Schlagle's success is probably attributable to factors particular to the school and its environment, some of it may well be due to Pulaski's role as a "test lab," supplying important lessons about what should be changed the next time around.

III. Combining Structure and Process

As was noted in Chapter 1, at the outset of the demonstration, MDRC staff were divided in their views about what the demonstration should entail. Some argued that the essence lay in putting into place the key structures — teacher-student teams, shared scheduling, common plan-

ning periods, the teacher coach and other forms of professional development — and then studying what flowed from these elements. Others maintained that a focus on structure was insufficient and that more attention needed to be paid to ensuring that the hoped-for behavioral changes would, in fact, occur once the structures were in place.

Examples drawn from the experiences of the two sites lend support to the second vision of demonstration building. Daily teacher team meetings were a key element of Project Transition at Pulaski from the outset of the demonstration, and they unquestionably fostered a spirit of greater collegiality. But research suggests that some forms of teacher collegiality — such as storytelling, talk about teachers' social lives, talk about the foibles and failures of students and their families — have little impact on the culture of a school. Rather, the kinds of teacher interactions that result in school improvement are those in which there is frequent, ongoing, cumulative talk about teaching and learning (Little, 1990). Contrary to the intentions of demonstration planners, there is little evidence that teacher team meetings at Pulaski were used for extended talk about teachers' instructional practices or about academic (as distinct from behavioral) solutions to students' academic problems.

In contrast, teacher team meetings at Schlagle were relatively focused on instructional issues. At the conclusion of the demonstration, the assistant principal at Schlagle asserted that the teacher team meetings had been a venue for discussion of instructional concerns in part because she and the coach had attended the meetings regularly and had kept the teachers' talk focused on these topics. She speculated that had they not provided this guidance, the Schlagle teachers, like those at Pulaski, would have spent more of their time talking about the personal problems of their students.

Similarly, the hiring of a coach did not ensure that that individual would actively assist the professional development of the Project Transition teachers. While the coach in Kansas City routinely facilitated the team meetings and observed teachers' classrooms to provide feedback, her Pulaski counterpart did not. Several factors may explain the different patterns of interaction between coach and teachers at the two sites. It seems possible that the Schlagle coach had a clearer understanding of what the position entailed, and likely, too, that she brought more interpersonal and substantive skills to the job.[1] It is also clear that the Schlagle coach received far more support for her activities from the assistant principal and the Learning Exchange than the resource support teacher got from Pulaski administrators or the Alverno College representative. The centrality of the Schlagle coach to the assistant principal's vision of educational reform at the school was never in doubt; at Pulaski, in contrast, the role of the resource support teacher was never viewed by any party as more than peripheral, perhaps because teachers were never fully convinced of the need for this position.

In retrospect, it seems plausible that if a greater number of structural changes had been specified in Milwaukee, Project Transition might have been implemented more powerfully there. For example, a certain number of visits to other teachers' classrooms could have been written into the job descriptions of teachers participating in the project. A menu of possible innovations

[1]A Milwaukee Public Schools official suggested that preservice training might help a prospective coach to perform the role more effectively.

(cooperative learning, team teaching, e.g.) could have been set before the teachers, with each team selecting one approach and working from the start to implement that strategy.

The general lesson, however, is that *structural changes and sought-after behavioral changes do not inevitably go hand in hand.* Sometimes, changes in structure do bring about behavioral effects, but these are not necessarily the ones sought. Teachers at Pulaski, by all accounts, interacted more after team meetings were instituted than they had previously, but these interactions did not greatly affect their classroom practices. Sometimes, structural changes scarcely affect behavior at all, as was the case with the resource support teacher in Milwaukee (and also with the learning resource partner, whose services were used by only one of the three teacher teams during the demonstration's second year). New structures may help to bring about behavioral changes, but they are unlikely to be sufficient to create such changes on their own. *Additional efforts must be put in place that directly promote and support people as they go about making changes in attitudes and actions.* Providing preservice and in-service training to the Project Transition coach is an example of such an effort.

In this regard, it may be useful to distinguish between *incentives* and *capacity* to change. Structures may help to create incentives, and these are clearly important. But the process of intervention by skilled change agents may be critical for creating the capacity for teachers and others to make use of these incentives and to use the opportunities created by structural changes to induce behavioral change.

IV. Reflections on the Impact Findings

The data presented in Chapter 6 suggest several lessons that may apply not only to the Project Transition demonstration but, more generally, to any efforts to evaluate the impacts of educational interventions.

The first such lesson is straightforward: *Implementation matters.* Project Transition students at Schlagle registered significantly more positive attitudes toward school than their predemonstration counterparts. Furthermore, at-risk students in the Project Transition cohort also showed increases in academic achievement, as reflected by increases in the number of credits earned and in the percentage of students who had a D average or higher. It is especially remarkable that these results were achieved after just one year. And it is unlikely that they would have been realized if the Project Transition teachers had not been guided and prodded by the assistant principal and the coach to subscribe to a common set of principles, which they then hammered home to all their students: We have high expectations of you. We want you to work hard. Achievement matters. You can achieve. We will assist and support you in your efforts. This common set of principles was supported by an emphasis on instructional practice as well. At Pulaski, where implementation was less thorough, Project Transition students did not develop

more positive attitudes toward their teachers or toward school, and there were no increases in academic achievement attributable to the intervention.[2]

A second key finding and lesson is that, as hypothesized, *Project Transition had different effects on different subgroups of the student population.* The project was targeted toward students who were mid-level and low-end achievers in middle school, and it was these groups who realized its benefits. Impacts on academic outcomes for the Schlagle sample as a whole are driven almost entirely by its effects on academically at-risk students (defined as students whose attendance in 8th grade fell below 93 percent). The intervention had little effect, positive or negative, on students who were not at risk.

The demonstration results obviously do not address what would happen if the intervention were restricted to at-risk students. One might expect, however, that such special treatment would quickly result in negative labeling and stigmatization. Given the project's positive effects on at-risk students and the fact that it does no harm to students who are not at risk, it appears to be an appropriate intervention for all incoming 9th graders, not just those who can be predicted to benefit from it.

It is interesting to note that Project Transition affected students' social relations with their peers more strongly at Pulaski than at Schlagle. Compared with the pre-PT cohort, Pulaski students in the second demonstration year (PT-2) registered more positive attitudes on virtually every measure. They reported greater familiarity with and support from their fellow students, and they felt more accepted by students of different ethnic backgrounds than the pre-PT cohort. They also appeared to be less influenced by a peer culture that emphasized nonacademic values (being tough, dressing well, getting around the rules, etc.). At Schlagle, Project Transition's impacts on students' attitudes toward their classmates were more mixed. Students were more likely to report feeling supported by their peers but no more likely than those in the pre-PT cohort to report knowing other students well. They were also less likely to report feeling accepted by students of different backgrounds.

A plausible hypothesis for this impact is that inherent differences in recruitment patterns between the two schools help to explain the subsequent differences in impact findings. Pulaski draws its students from some 20 middle schools and other feeder schools located all over Milwaukee, no one of which supplies more than 9 percent of the entering class of 9th graders. Thus, it seems likely that, as intended by demonstration planners, the shared scheduling that took place during the second year provided incoming freshmen at Pulaski with a sense of security and belonging that otherwise would have been lacking, especially early on. In contrast, almost half of Schlagle's students come from two middle schools. Furthermore, Kansas City, Kansas, is a much smaller, more homogeneous city than Milwaukee, so Schlagle students are also in a better position to know their fellow students through mutual friends or family connections than are students

[2]Although at Pulaski there was a statistically significant increase in number of credits accumulated, this appears to be attributable to the fact that in the 1996-97 school year, 9th graders were discouraged from taking two study halls, neither of which granted a credit, and encouraged to substitute a credit-granting class instead. This move appears to have been part of a general plan to upgrade academic standards at the school, rather than a result of Project Transition.

at Pulaski. Consequently, students arrive at Schlagle already knowing a sizable number of classmates and looking forward to meeting new people, and it appears that they rather quickly experienced shared scheduling as disappointingly restrictive and conducive to petty squabbles, although over time they complained less vociferously. Schlagle 9th graders' responses to questions about their acceptance by students from different backgrounds may reflect these minor conflicts, as well as students' feelings of frustration with their small-group clusters and their wish to expand their social frontiers.

This suggests a third lesson regarding program impacts. *Programs may have very different impacts in different settings because of the ways in which program elements interact with factors in the social surround.* Project Transition may have had a more positive effect on the peer relationships of students at Pulaski precisely because the need for it was greater in that school environment.

Accordingly, different levels of shared scheduling may be appropriate for different sites. Ninth graders at Pulaski and Schlagle were slated to experience the same amount of shared scheduling (since the people who were responsible for arranging the students' schedules used the same algorithm to do so). But in one school, students developed more positive attitudes toward one another, while in the other school, more intragroup in-fighting and back-biting initially resulted. A slightly lesser amount of shared scheduling at Schlagle might have given students there an optimum amount of exposure to new people.

Still, the Schlagle experience suggests that Project Transition may have affected students' engagement in school and their academic performance in part because students quickly became disenchanted with the social possibilities of school and buckled down to make a serious academic effort instead. Students themselves seemed to have some sense that this was the case. Schlagle 9th graders who participated in a focus group conducted less than two months after school began were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of the teacher-student clusters and of being with the same group of students every day. Several comments are illustrative and telling:

> [An advantage is that] if you clown around at the beginning of the year, after a while, everyone knows you're funny, and it's not that important any more, so you say, you might as well get your work done. [A disadvantage is that] you don't know that many people.
>
> As far as classmates, there's no advantage. As far as teachers, the advantage is that if I was having problems with one teacher, let's say my English teacher, then I could go talk to my math teacher and my science teacher, and we could have a discussion about that. That's the only advantage. There's a lot of disadvantages. I don't like seeing the same people every hour, and it's getting old.
>
> [The advantage is that] you can get help with your work, or you can help each other. The disadvantage is that you get tired of seeing the same people every day.

These quotations, and the Schlagle experience more generally, suggest that *the pathway through which a program produces impacts may turn out to be different from the one originally hypothesized in the program model.* Initially, it was postulated that Project Transition students' stronger feelings of attachment to their peers would produce a greater sense of belonging and engagement in school, and this in turn would improve students' academic performance. For 9th graders at Schlagle, shared scheduling, combined with having known some students during middle school, seems to have produced a certain degree of boredom with the social environment. However, disengagement from the social possibilities of the peer network may have created the psychological space that enabled students to accept and respond to teachers' messages about effort and achievement.

Another possibility is that it is students' relationships with their teachers, not their peers, that most influence academic achievement. If this is the case, then the efforts of Project Transition teachers at Schlagle to create an environment that was at once both demanding and supportive may largely explain the positive results at the site.

Project Transition was not intended to do all things for all students. It aimed to make school a more congenial environment that would promote academic achievement, and it sought to create a *supportive* peer network, not a *broad* one. This is not to say that social relationships are unimportant; making new friends and learning how to interact with a wide variety of people are important parts of the high school experience (and, more generally, of growing up). Schools in which 9th graders meet a limited number of peers because of shared scheduling may wish to address students' social needs through special events and school-sponsored activities that bring together the class as a whole. In this way, students can benefit both from the supportive relationships they develop in their own clusters and from broader exposure to students in other clusters.

The impacts on student outcomes at Schlagle are promising but modest. *This suggests that Project Transition may function as a platform for other school reform interventions.* It seems plausible that new curricula and teaching methods may be more easily implemented when they are supported by teacher teams and strong coaching.

Two other findings apply to the impact study of Project Transition and of educational change interventions more generally. First, while the Schlagle results hold some promise, ultimately two major questions remain: Are the results idiosyncratic and confined to a single cohort? and Did the project make a lasting difference — did it affect academic performance in the later grades and ultimately increase graduation rates? (Pulaski staff, it is worth noting, speculated that participation in Project Transition might affect students' attendance and performance in the upper grades even though it did not appear to have immediate impacts.) Unfortunately, these questions are beyond the scope of this evaluation. A clear implication is that *evaluations must be funded at a level that will permit examination of more than one cohort and adequate follow-up so that issues of generalizability and long-term as well as short-term effectiveness can be addressed.*

Finally, large, unpredicted, and unpredictable changes in the demographic characteristics of the research cohorts at Pulaski inevitably raise questions about the impact findings for the Milwaukee site. Despite efforts to control statistically for these changes, the reliability of the Milwaukee findings remains uncertain. While Project Transition could not be evaluated experi-

mentally, the Pulaski experience suggests, once again, that *the methodological rigor of the results yielded by research designs employing random assignment to treatment and control groups is unparalleled, and evaluations of education reforms should use these designs wherever feasible.*

Some changes are readily measurable, others less so. It is our hope and belief that Project Transition has in some way changed for the better the beliefs and behavior of all those associated with it: planners and evaluators, administrators and teachers, and most important, the students it is intended to help.

Appendix A

Survey Analysis

Table A.1 presents results from factor analyses run for each of the survey constructs using pre-PT groups from both schools. Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, a statistical measure of the degree of correlation among related questionnaire items, was calculated for each construct. Alpha levels between .60 and 1.0 are generally considered acceptable (Hatcher, 1994). The numbers in the table indicate that all but three of the alpha levels are above .6. In addition, two of the remaining three constructs have values very close to .6 (.58 and .59).

Table A.2 presents a test of the Project Transition model outlined in Chapter 5. The relationships between survey constructs are measured using regression analysis run for two pre-PT groups combined. Each number in the table is a coefficient from a regression in which the outcome variable (listed at the top of the column) is regressed on a survey construct (listed on the row heading). The standard error of the coefficient is in parentheses.

The first number in the table, for example, is the coefficient obtained by regressing values for the autonomy construct on values for the teacher involvement construct. The coefficient indicates that a one-unit increase in teacher involvement is associated with an increase in autonomy of .365. Stated another way, students' reports of teacher involvement are positively related to their reports of perceived autonomy.

The numbers in panel 1 indicate that each of the constructs measuring students' relationships with teachers and students is positively related to autonomy, competence, and reports of relatedness with teachers and students. In addition, all the coefficients are statistically significant. The first part of the model, stating that students' relationships affect their self-perceptions, fits the data.

Panel 2 presents information on the next part of the model: the influence of self-perceptions on engagement in school. The numbers indicate that each of the constructs measuring self-perceptions is positively related to students' reports of behavioral and affective engagement. For example, a one-unit increase in perceived autonomy is associated with a .538-unit increase in behavioral engagement.

Finally, panel 3 presents information on the relationships between the engagement measures and academic outcomes (obtained from the school records data). All the coefficients are positive and statistically significant, indicating that student engagement and outcomes are positively correlated.

Table A.1

Alpha Values for Survey Constructs

Student perceptions of teachers	
Involvement	0.66
Support/fairness	0.67
Expectations	0.45
Competence	0.76
Student perceptions of classmates	
Support	0.52
Familiarity	0.60
Affirmation of identity	0.60
Student perceptions of the best way to get respect	
To be nondisruptive	0.76
To work hard in school	0.76
Student feelings of relatedness	
With teachers	0.72
With classmates	0.61
Student perceptions of autonomy and engagement	
Autonomy	0.78
Competence	0.83
Reaction to a school-based challenge	
Internal	0.74
External	0.62
Affective engagement	0.58
Behavioral engagement	0.77
Sample size	1336

SOURCE: Project Transition Student Survey.

Table A.2

The Association Between Intermediate and Ultimate Outcomes

	Outcome Variable			
Panel 1	Perceived autonomy	Perceived competence	Relatedness-teachers	Relatedness-classmates
Student perceptions of teachers				
Involvement	0.365	0.154	0.588	
	(.046)	(.042)	(.038)	
Support/fairness	0.437	0.305	0.633	
	(.050)	(.044)	(.042)	
Expectations	0.390	0.244	0.462	
	(.048)	(.043)	(.043)	
Competence	0.424	0.140	0.446	
	(.044)	(.041)	(.040)	
Student perceptions of classmates				
Support	0.216	0.117		0.226
	(.046)	(.041)		(.044)
Familiarity	0.041	0.201		0.333
	(.040)	(.034)		(.034)
Affirmation of identity	0.217	0.383		0.403
	(.053)	(.043)		(.047)
Student perceptions of the best way to get respect				
To be nondisruptive	0.173	0.197		0.126
	(.045)	(.039)		(.043)
To work hard in school	0.284	0.041		0.078
	(.038)	(.034)		(.037)
Student feelings of relatedness				
With teachers	0.390	0.254		
	(.046)	(.041)		
With classmates	0.114	0.237		
	(.051)	(.042)		
Panel 2	Behavioral engagement	Affective engagement		
Student perceptions of autonomy and engagement				
Autonomy	0.538	0.315		
	(.026)	(.047)		
Competence	0.413	0.222		
	(.037)	(.057)		
Reaction to a school-based challenge				
Internal	0.431	0.311		
	(.032)	(.049)		
External	0.331	0.280		
	(.029)	(.043)		

(continued)

Table A.2 (continued)

Panel 3	Outcome Variable: Attendance Rate	Outcome Variable: GPA
Behavioral engagement	0.039	0.691
	(.011)	(.084)
Affective engagement	0.014	0.233
	(.008)	(.065)

SOURCE: Project Transition Student Survey.

NOTES: See Table 5.1 for the statements included in each construct.

Each number is the coefficient obtained from a regression of the variable in the column heading on the variable in the row heading. The numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Each regression model is estimated using the pre-PT groups at Pulaski and Schlagle combined. The results were very similar when estimated for each group separately. For the regression analysis, the outcomes used are the average construct values.

Appendix B

Response Analysis for the Project Transition Student Survey

This appendix describes findings from analyses that were conducted (1) to determine the comparability of students who completed the questionnaire and those who did not and (2) to compare impacts on educational outcomes for those who completed the survey with impacts for the full sample.

I. Comparison of Survey Respondents and Nonrespondents

The impact, or analysis, sample consists of 2,101 students across the two sites. This includes students who attended the school at some point prior to February of the spring semester and who were not repeating 9th grade. At Pulaski, students in the vocational education program (referred to as the SWIS program) and students identified as "special education-mentally retarded" were also excluded from the sample.

The survey was targeted to all students in the Pre-PT and PT years who were enrolled at the time of administration. At Pulaski, 49 percent of the impact sample completed the questionnaire, and at Schlagle, 63 percent. T-tests were conducted to determine whether students who responded to the survey differed on demographic characteristics or performance in 8th grade from those who did not respond. Tables B.1 and B.2 present characteristics for each group at Pulaski and Schlagle, respectively. Asterisks indicate the differences that are statistically significant.

At Pulaski, the respondent group has more girls, fewer black students, and more white students. Respondents live in census tracts with higher median income than nonrespondents. In addition, students in the two groups represent a different mix of middle schools. Respondents performed better in 8th grade, having had higher average GPAs and lower absence and tardy rates. They were also less likely to have been enrolled as special education students or to have ever been suspended. Differences in characteristics between respondents and non-respondents were also run for the Pre-PT and PT groups separately. The results were similar to those reported in Table B.1

At Schlagle, the respondent group has more girls, more black students, and fewer white students. Students in the two groups represent a slightly different neighborhood mix, in that more respondents reside in zip code 1. Respondents are somewhat younger than nonrespondents. Students in the two groups represent a different mix of middle schools. Respondents performed better in 8th grade, having had higher average GPAs, lower absence rates, and higher average standardized reading and math scores. They were also less likely to have changed schools or been enrolled as special education students. Differences in characteristics between respondents and nonrespondents were found to be similar when run for the Pre-PT and PT groups separately.

II. Comparison of Impacts for Survey Respondents and the Full Sample

The pattern of impacts for students responding to the survey are for the most part similar to those for the full impact sample (see Table B.3). In some cases, differences that are significant

Table B.1

Characteristics of Project Transition Survey Respondents and Nonrespondents at Pulaski High School

Characteristic	Respondents	Nonrespondents
Sex (%)		
Female	50.9	41.9 ***
Race/ethnicity (%)		
Black	31.7	50.4 ***
Hispanic	18.5	17.7
White[a]	49.8	32.0 ***
Other		
Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (%)	59.3	63.4 ***
Median family income in Census tract of residence ($)	24,907	21,366 ***
Age at start of 9th grade (years)	14.9	15.2
Percentage of students from feeder middle school		
1	9.4	8.3
2	2.6	5.1 **
3	2.3	3.7
4	4.2	2.3 *
5	7.2	6.3
6	1.6	4.3 ***
7	14.1	6.8 ***
8	6.2	7.1
Other middle schools in district	24.7	27.2
Alternative schools	5.7	7.8
Schools out of district	22.0	2.2
8th-grade performance		
GPA	2.44	1.54 ***
Absence rate (%)	7.2	14.5 ***
Ever suspended (%)	29.8	61.3 ***
Tardy rate (%)	3.5	5.8 ***
Percentage of special education students	4.0	20.7 ***
Sample size	615	651

SOURCES: Student records from the Milwaukee Public Schools and the 1990 Census.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels for the difference between Respondents and Nonrespondents are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

The sample consists of the pre-PT and PT groups combined.

Data on 8th-grade performance are not available for students who attended middle school outside of the district.

[a]This category includes a small percentage of students classified as Asian, American Indian, and "other."

Table B.2

Characteristics of Project Transition Survey Respondents and Nonrespondents at Schlagle High School

Characteristic	Respondents	Nonrespondents
Sex (%)		
Female	49.6	39.2 ***
Race/ethnicity (%)		
Black	78.1	68.3 ***
Hispanic	1.9	1.6
White[a]	20.0	30.1 ***
Other		
From zipcode 1	55.9	46.6 ***
From zipcode 2	26.6	31.4
From all other zipcodes	17.5	22.0
Age at start of 9th grade (years)	14.7	15.1 ***
Percentage of students from feeder middle school		
1	24.5	24.3
2	27.9	17.8 ***
3	11.6	13.9
4	9.9	3.6 ***
Other middle schools in district	20.5	18.8
Schools out of district	5.5	21.7 ***
8th-grade performance		
GPA	2.62	1.80 ***
Absence rate (%)	5.6	15.9 ***
Changed schools during year (%)	7.8	19.0 ***
Reading percentile score (%)	29.7	19.2 ***
Math percentile score (%)	30.2	21.2 ***
Percentage of special education students	3.4	26.4 ***
Sample size	526	309

SOURCE: Student records from the Kansas City Public Schools.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels for the difference between Respondents and Nonrespondents are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

The sample consists of the pre-PT and PT groups combined.

Data on 8th-grade performance are not available for students who attended middle school outside of the district.

[a]This category includes a small percentage of students classified as Asian, American Indian, and "other."

Table B.3

Project Transition's Effects on Credits Earned, Grades, and Attendance for the Survey Sample

Measure	Pulaski High School					Schlagle High School		
	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT Group
Credits								
Number of credits earned	4.87	5.00	5.08	0.13	0.21	5.57	5.61	0.04
Percentage of courses passed[a]	79.6	79.5	82.1	-0.1	2.5	82.0	81.7	-0.4
Grades								
GPA	1.86	1.96	1.92	0.05	0.10	2.04	1.99	-0.06
Percentage with GPA greater than 2.0	44.4	47.1	48.1	2.7	3.7	54.3	50.3	-4.0
Percentage with GPA greater than 1.0	78.8	74.5	79.0	-4.3	0.3	81.0	80.6	-0.4
Absence rate (%)	14.6	15.0	13.5	0.4	-1.1	14.4	14.0	-0.4
Percentage of students absent 20 or more days	43.1	42.8	37.1	-0.3	-6.0	29.1	29.5	0.4
Percentage reported as dropped out (including suspensions)						5.9	6.6	0.7
Percentage reported as dropped out (excluding suspensions)						4.3	3.3	-1.0
Discipline								
Percentage ever suspended						35.6	35.8	0.2
Number of suspension referrals								
None						41.9	37.8	-4.1
1 to 3						30.0	34.9	4.9
4 or more						28.2	27.4	-0.8
Sample size	197	194	224			253	273	

SOURCES: Student records from the Kansas City Public Schools and Project Transition Student Survey.

NOTES: All impacts for each school are regression-adjusted using the baseline characteristics listed in Tables 5.3 and 5.4.
Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

[a]Percentage of courses passed is equal to credits earned divided by credits attempted.

for the whole sample are not for the respondent subsample. This may partly reflect smaller sample sizes and the fact that the respondent group is somewhat less at risk.

As described in Chapter 6, Project Transition was hypothesized to ease the transition for at-risk students in particular. As the data in Tables B.1 and B.2 show, the survey groups at both schools are somewhat less at risk than the full impact sample. At-risk students make up 52 percent of the Pulaski impact sample and only 27 percent of the survey responder group. At Schlagle, at-risk students make up 37.7 percent of the impact sample and 29.5 percent of the survey responder group. It follows that the survey group may not exhibit the impacts experienced by the full sample. Analyses were also run for the at-risk survey responders; findings for this sample will be described when they differ from the full survey sample.

A. Attendance

As described in Chapter 6, two measures of attendance were examined: the absence rate, defined as the total days absent divided by the total days enrolled, and the percentage of students missing 20 or more days. In both sites, the findings for survey respondents are consistent with those for the impact sample in that absenteeism was not reduced. However, for the at-risk survey group at Schlagle, there is a positive impact on the absence rate in that it was reduced by 5.4 percentage points. This impact is similar to results for an at-risk group that excluded students thought to be at very high risk (see footnote 11 in Chapter 6). As with the full sample, there was no impact found for the survey sample on the rate of dropping out.

Impacts were found for the full sample at Schlagle on the number of suspension referrals and the percentage of students who were listed as suspended at some point during the year. There was a decrease in the number of referrals but an increase in the percentage of students ever suspended. These impacts were not found for the survey sample. However, for the at-risk group of survey respondents, there was a similar impact on the percentage of students ever suspended.

B. Credits Earned

The impacts found on measures of credits earned for the full sample are not significant for the survey sample. At Pulaski, the increase in credits earned is similar in size to that for the full sample but is not statistically significant, primarily because of the smaller sample size. At Schlagle, the increase in credits earned is significant at the 14 percent level. The difference in the percentage of courses passed is closer in size to that for the low-to-moderate-risk group than for the full sample.

In sum, students who responded to the survey are higher achieving and less at risk than students who did not respond, as seen in Tables B.1 and B.2 The impacts for the survey group reflect this. At Pulaski, effects for the survey group on the number of credits earned and the percentage of students with GPAs greater than 1.0, though not significant, are more similar to the impact sample effects than to effects for the high-risk group. At Schlagle, effects on the aforementioned measures, though not significant, are more similar to those for the low-risk group. Because of these differences, survey impacts reported in the text should be interpreted with some caution. Results might be different if all students in the impact sample had taken the survey.

Appendix C

Unadjusted Impacts

Table C.1

Unadjusted Impacts on Students' Relationships with Teachers and Classmates

Measure	Pulaski High School					Schlagle High School		
	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT Group
Student perceptions of teachers								
Involvement	50.3	48.5	47.3	-1.8	-2.9	50.0	57.7	7.7 *
Support/fairness	48.2	48.5	51.8	0.2	3.6	50.6	45.2	-5.4
Expectations	43.1	53.6	47.8	10.5 **	4.6	56.5	69.1	12.6 ***
Competence	54.3	58.2	47.3	3.9	-7.0	64.7	73.5	8.8 **
Student perceptions of classmates								
Support	42.1	46.6	56.3	4.5	14.1 ***	29.6	36.0	6.4
Familiarity	60.0	64.1	72.2	4.1	12.2 ***	67.2	63.2	-4.0
Affirmation of identity	48.0	51.0	56.7	3.1	8.7 *	56.1	40.8	-15.3 ***
Student perceptions of the best way to get respect								
To be nondisruptive	57.5	62.9	69.7	5.4	12.2 ***	43.8	35.8	-8.0 *
To work hard in school	53.9	58.1	65.2	4.3	11.3 **	46.0	53.1	7.1

(continued)

Table C.1 (continued)

Measure	Pulaski High School					Schlagle High School		
	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT Group
Student feelings of relatedness								
With teachers	48.5	52.6	50.7	4.1	2.2	60.7	65.8	5.1
With students	48.5	53.6	52.9	5.2	4.4	57.1	55.9	-1.3
Sample size	197	194	224			253	272	

SOURCE: Project Transition Student Survey.

NOTES: See Table 5.1 for the statements included in each construct.

Survey outcomes are defined as the percentage of students providing a high rating for the given construct. A high rating is one that is above the average response given by less engaged students, where less engaged students are those with attendance rates in 9th grade of less than 89 percent.

Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

Sample sizes vary slightly for the survey measures because every respondent did not necessarily respond to each item.

Table C.2

Unadjusted Impacts on Students' Self-Perceptions and Engagement in School

Measure	Pulaski High School					Schlagle High School		
	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT Group
Perceived autonomy	57.9	62.4	62.1	4.5	4.2	61.5	64.0	2.5
Perceived competence	60.4	59.3	55.4	-1.1	-5.0	69.6	61.4	-8.2 **
Reaction to a school-based challenge								
Internal	56.8	60.6	60.1	3.8	3.2	64.1	63.2	-0.9
External	52.8	40.7	43.8	-12.1 **	-9.0 *	61.4	68.4	7.0 *
Affective engagement	59.7	59.9	66.1	0.2	6.4	62.3	60.7	-1.6
Behavioral engagement	60.4	55.7	61.6	-4.7	1.2	62.4	64.7	2.3
Sample size	197	194	224			253	272	

SOURCE: Project Transition Student Survey.

NOTES: See Table 5.1 for the statements included in each construct.

Survey outcomes are defined as the percentage of students providing a high rating for the given construct. A high rating is one that is above the average response given by less engaged students, where less engaged students are those with attendance rates in 9th grade of less than 89 percent.

Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

Sample sizes vary slightly for the survey measures because every respondent did not necessarily respond to each item.

Table C.3

Unadjusted Impacts on Students' Attendance and Discipline

Measure	Pulaski High School					Schlagle High School		
	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT Group
Attendance								
Absence rate (%)	32.3	31.9	27.0	-0.3	-5.3 ***	15.7	16.1	0.3
Percentage of students absent 20 or more days	62.9	62.6	55.7	-0.3	-7.3 **	32.8	35.1	2.3
Percentage reported as dropped out (including suspensions)						5.5	7.6	2.0
Percentage reported as dropped out (excluding suspensions)						4.3	4.1	-0.2
Discipline/suspensions								
Number of suspension referrals								
None						35.4	39.4	3.9
1 to 3						28.9	38.9	10.0 ***
4 or more						35.7	21.7	-13.9 ***
Percentage ever suspended						28.1	47.4	19.2 ***
Sample size[a]	391	425	435			398	437	

SOURCES: Student records from the Milwaukee and Kansas City Public Schools.

NOTES: Student records on drop out rates and discipline levels are not available for Pulaski High School.
Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.
[a]Schlagle High School sample sizes for the absence measures vary slightly.

Table C.4

Unajusted Impacts on Students' Credits Earned and Grades

Measure	Pulaski High School					Schlagle High School		
	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT Group
Credits								
Number of credits earned	3.50	3.36	4.09	-0.14	0.59***	5.32	5.48	0.16
Percentage of courses passed[a]	59.2	55.4	67.0	-3.7	7.9***	78.6	80.0	1.3
Sample size	359	382	404			366	379	
Grades								
GPA	1.29	1.25	1.50	-0.03	0.22***	2.00	1.87	-0.14 *
Percentage with GPA greater than 2.0	26.5	27.2	35.2	0.8	8.7***	53.3	44.9	-8.5 **
Percentage with GPA greater than 1.0	57.2	48.5	61.7	-8.7 **	4.5	76.9	78.5	1.6
Sample size	359	382	404			368	395	

SOURCES: Student records from the Milwaukee and Kansas City Public Schools.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

[a]Percentage of courses passed is equal to credits earned divided by credits attempted.

Table C.5

Unadjusted Impacts for Subgroups of Students at Pulaski High School

Measure	Moderate- to High-Risk Group					Low-Risk Group				
	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group
Survey impacts (%)										
Student perceptions of relatedness with teachers	56.5	47.1	43.4	-9.4	-13.1	45.6	53.7	53.4	8.1	7.9
Student perceptions of affective engagement	57.5	49.1	60.5	-8.4	3.0	55.9	65.9	66.7	10.0	10.8
Sample size	62	51	53			68	82	117		
Records impacts										
Credits earned	2.79	2.17	3.07	-0.62 **	0.28	4.44	4.59	4.88	0.16	0.44
Percentage of courses passed[a]	48.2	36.8	52.9	-11.4 **	4.8	71.7	73.8	76.8	2.1	5.1
GPA	0.90	0.66	1.00	-0.24 **	0.10	1.67	1.75	1.78	0.08	0.11
Percentage with GPA greater than 1.0	45.9	25.8	45.2	-20.0 ***	-0.7	72.1	68.7	71.1	-3.5	-1.0
Sample size	116	148	151			104	118	166		
Attendance (%)										
Absence rate	41.1	45.7	39.4	4.7	-1.7	21.5	17.9	16.2	-3.7	-5.3
Sample size	162	160	124			109	128	174		

(continued)

Table C.5 (continued)

SOURCES: Student records from the Milwaukee Public Schools and Project Transition Student Survey.

NOTES: The moderate- to high-risk group contains students with 8th-grade attendance rates of less than 93 percent. The low-risk group contains students with 8th-grade attendance rates of 93 percent or higher.

Survey outcomes are defined as the percentage of students providing a high rating for the given construct. A high rating is one that is above the average response given by less engaged students, where less engaged students are those with attendance rates in 9th grade of less than 89 percent.

Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

Sample sizes vary slightly for the survey measures because every respondent did not necessarily respond to each item.

[a]Percentage of courses passed is equal to credits earned divided by credits attempted.

Table C.6

Unadjusted Impacts for Subgroups of Students at Schlagle High School

Measure	Moderate- to High-Risk Group			Low-Risk Group		
	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PTGroup	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PTGroup
Survey impacts (%)						
Student perceptions of relatedness with teachers	36.2	66.0	29.8 ***	65.1	64.4	-0.7
Student perceptions of classmate support	38.7	25.9	-12.8	28.0	39.7	11.7 **
Sample size	44	62		193	194	
Records impacts						
Credits earned	4.2	4.8	0.7 **	6.1	6.2	0.1
Percentage of courses passed[a]	60.9	70.0	9.1 **	90.4	89.9	-0.5
Sample size	117	118		218	211	
GPA	1.31	1.34	0.03	2.46	2.29	-0.17 *
Percentage with GPA greater than 1.0	54.2	64.1	9.8	92.2	90.3	-2.0
Sample size	118	128		219	216	
Percentage reported as dropped out (including suspensions)	15.2	11.9	-3.3	0.9	2.2	1.4
Percentage reported as dropped out (excluding suspensions)	11.4	5.6	-5.8 *	0.9	1.3	0.5
Sample size	132	143		230	225	
Attendance (%)						
Absence rate	28.5	25.2	-3.2	7.0	6.9	-0.1
Sample size	129	143		225	225	

(continued)

SOURCES: Student records from the Kansas City Public Schools and Project Transition Student Survey.

NOTES: The moderate- to high-risk group contains students with 8th-grade attendance rates of less than 93 percent. The low-risk group contains students with 8th-grade attendance rates of 93 percent or higher.

Survey outcomes are defined as the percentage of students providing a high rating for the given construct. A high rating is one that is above the average response given by less engaged students, where less engaged students are those with attendance rates in 9th grade of less than 89 percent.

Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

Sample sizes vary slightly for the survey measures because every respondent did not necessarily respond to each item.

[a]Percentage of courses passed is equal to credits earned divided by credits attempted.

Appendix D

Regression-Adjustment Model and Sensitivity Analyses

The impacts presented in the report are regression-adjusted to control for differences in characteristics across groups. The characteristics controlled for are several demographic factors plus various measures of academic performance in 8th grade. Table D.1 presents the coefficients from the regression model run for 9th-grade grade point average (GPA).

The models shown in the table are run for the pre-PT and PT samples in both sites and do not include variables indicating Project Transition status. The top panel presents coefficients for demographic factors. The coefficients on black and Hispanic status are difficult to interpret by themselves, since race is interacted with several other variables (see the bottom panel). Students who are older at the start of 9th grade have lower GPAs than younger students; student age is designed to capture whether a student was retained in a grade prior to 9th grade. Area of residence is included to capture socioeconomic status, and the coefficients indicate that this variable influences academic performance; both zipcode variables are statistically significant for Schlagle, and, at Pulaski, median family income in the student's census tract is positively related to GPA.

The next panel presents coefficients on the 8th-grade variables. Not surprisingly, GPA in 8th grade has a strong effect on GPA in 9th grade, and the coefficients are very similar across the two schools (.542 for Schlagle and .589 for Pulaski). Interactions of race with GPA indicate that GPA has similar effects across races at Schlagle, but not at Pulaski; the coefficient on the interaction of black with GPA indicates that 8th-grade GPA is a stronger determinant of 9th-grade GPA for black students than for white students. Students with higher 8th-grade absence rates have lower GPAs, and these coefficients are significant for both samples. In addition, at Pulaski, absences have less of a negative effect on GPA for black students than for white students (shown by the positive coefficient on the interaction of black with the absence rate). At Schlagle, information is also available on MAT7 test scores. Interestingly, only the score on the total math test has a significantly positive impact on 9th-grade GPA.

The final point to note about the models is that they do a fairly good job of predicting 9th-grade GPA; the R^2s indicate that the variables included in the model explain 62 percent of the variation in GPA at Schlagle and 50 percent at Pulaski. The purpose of regression adjustment is to control for differences across groups in factors that might affect high school outcomes. The highly explanatory power of the model indicates that these factors are important determinants of GPA.

The primary steps in the analysis of program impacts are the determination of the impact sample and the definition of the regression-adjustment model. An important part of the analysis is to assess how sensitive the estimated impacts are to changes in either one of these factors. For the following, a sensitivity analysis is conducted by varying the definition of the impact sample. Although not reported, the impacts were not sensitive to the regression-adjustment model. Once the basic model was specified, with demographic variables plus 8th-grade outcomes, the results

Table D.1
Coefficients from Regression-Adjustment Model for 9th-Grade GPA

	Pulaski High School		Schlagle High School	
Demographics				
Female	0.075	(.082)	0.097	(.117)
Black	-0.528	(.221)	-0.167	(.306)
Hispanic	0.110	(.234)	-0.134	(.486)
Age at 9th grade	-0.243	(.041)	-0.246	(.050)
Zipcode 1			-0.183	(.084)
Zipcode 2			-0.195	(.088)
Median family income in Census tract (1000s)	0.010	(.003)		
8th-grade outcomes				
GPA	0.589	(.112)	0.542	(.118)
GPA < 1.0	0.046	(.322)	-0.319	(.283)
GPA 1.0-2.0	-0.468	(.215)	-0.505	(.186)
GPA 2.0-3.0	-0.515	(.138)	-0.375	(.108)
GPA missing	0.715	(.377)	1.038	(.432)
Absence rate	-2.234	(.674)	-1.547	(.808)
Absence rate missing	-0.123	(.141)	-0.556	(.381)
Special education	0.166	(.089)	0.117	(.096)
Changed schools during year			0.007	(.085)
MAT7 total reading score[a]			0.001	(.002)
Reading score missing			0.367	(.214)
MAT7 total math score			0.006	(.002)
Math score missing			-0.164	(.214)
Tardy rate	-0.777	(.587)		
Ever suspended	-0.095	(.070)		
Free/reduced-price lunch	-0.027	(.058)		
Interactions				
Black x 8th-grade GPA	0.154	(.068)	0.027	(.084)
Hispanic x 8th-grade GPA	-0.083	(.075)	-0.051	(.183)
Black x 8th-grade absence rate	1.897	(.736)	0.606	(.853)
Hispanic x 8th-grade absence rate	-0.540	(1.071)	2.555	(6.131)

(continued)

Table D.1 (continued)

Demographics	Pulaski High School		Schlagle High School	
Female x Black	0.014	(.113)	0.027	(.129)
Female x Hispanic	-0.211	(.146)	-0.817	(.504)
R-squared	0.504		0.619	
Sample size	1,145		763	

NOTES: Standard errors are in parentheses.

Also included in each model are dummy variables indicating the student's middle school and interactions of race/ethnicity with middle school.

[a]Pulaski High School does not use the MAT7 test.

were not sensitive to the addition of interaction terms or changes in the functional forms of variables.

Tables D.2 and D.3 present the results for four samples. The first is the full impact sample, and the results for this sample are reproduced here for comparison. The remaining three samples are subsets of the full sample: (1) those students who enrolled in the Project Transition school by the end of September, (2) those students enrolled in the Project Transition school for the whole year and who attended school regularly, and (3) those who attended middle school within the school district. The former two groups are chosen to examine the issue of dose effects, i.e., whether the program had varying effects on students who received greater doses of Project Transition. The latter group is included because these students will have less missing information on 8th-grade outcomes.

Table D.2 presents the results for Schlagle. The data indicate that the impacts are very similar across the samples. The impacts on the percentage of courses passed, for example, are similar in significance and magnitude across the various samples. The only difference for the absence rate is that the difference of 1.3 percentage points is statistically significant for the sample of students enrolled at Schlagle for the full year with regular attendance. However, the magnitude of the impacts on the absence rate is very similar across samples. The impact on the percentage of students with GPAs higher than a D average is also different for the sample with regular attendance (1.7 and insignificant, compared with 6.2 and significant for the full sample). This difference probably arises because GPA was fairly high to begin with for this group; over 90 percent of these students already earned an average higher than D.

The results for Pulaski are presented in Table D.3. A comparison of the impact columns shows that the story does not change much when the impact sample is varied. For the full sample, for example, Project Transition produced a statistically insignificant impact on the absence rate of 1.3 percentage points, compared with a statistically insignificant impact of 2.8 percentage points using the regularly attending sample (using the PT-2 versus pre-PT comparison).

Table D.2

Impacts Using Different Subsamples in Kansas City Public Schools

Outcome	Full Sample			Enrolled in Schlagle by End of September			Enrolled in Schlagle Whole Year with High Attendance			Attended Middle School in KC Public School District[a]		
	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Impact	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Impact	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Impact	Pre-PT Group	PT Group	Impact
Absence rate (%)	16.6	15.3	-1.3	14.8	14.0	-0.8	6.9	5.6	-1.3 *	15.2	13.8	-1.4
Sample size	389	425		344	363		200	193		359	372	
Number of credits earned	5.21	5.58	0.37 **	5.40	5.78	0.40 ***	6.19	6.42	0.23 **	5.38	5.77	0.38 ***
Percentage of courses passed[b]	77.1	81.4	4.3 **	79.5	83.8	4.2 **	90.5	92.8	2.3 *	79.1	83.4	4.3 ***
Sample size	366	379		327	330		200	192		339	332	
GPA	1.92	1.95	0.04	2.01	2.04	0.03	2.42	2.47	0.05	1.97	2.00	0.03
Percentage with GPA greater than 2.0	49.7	48.1	-1.6	53.6	51.4	-2.2	68.6	69.8	1.2	51.4	49.8	-1.7
Percentage with GPA greater than 1.0	74.5	80.7	6.2 **	78.5	83.2	4.7 *	93.1	94.7	1.7	77.2	82.0	4.8 *
Sample size	368	395		328	341		200	193		341	347	

SOURCE: Student records from the Kansas City Public Schools.

NOTES: All impacts for each school are regression-adjusted using the baseline characteristics listed in Tables 5.3 and 5.4.
Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

[a]KC = Kansas City Public Schools.

[b]Percentage of courses passed is equal to credits earned divided by credits attempted.

Table D.3

Impacts Using Different Subsamples in Milwaukee Public Schools

Outcome	Full Sample					In Pulaski by End of September				
	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group
Absence rate (%)	30.9	30.3	29.7	-0.6	-1.3	28.9	29.3	28.8	0.4	-0.2
Sample size	391	425	435			329	372	392		
Number of credits earned	3.56	3.57	3.83	0.01	0.27 *	3.84	3.72	4.02	-0.11	0.18
Percentage of courses passed[a]	60.1	58.6	63.0	-1.5	2.9	63.8	59.8	64.6	-4.0 *	0.8
Sample size	359	382	404			298	337	363		
GPA	1.32	1.35	1.38	0.03	0.06	1.42	1.40	1.41	-0.02	-0.01
Percentage with GPA greater than 2.0	27.3	30.8	31.0	3.5	3.8	30.9	32.2	31.2	1.3	0.3
Percentage with GPA greater than 1.0	58.3	52.2	57.1	-6.0 *	-1.1	62.2	53.0	58.7	-9.3 ***	-3.5
Sample size	359	382	404			298	337	363		

(continued)

Table D.3 (continued)

Outcome	Enrolled in Pulaski Whole Year With High Attendance					Attended Middle School in MLK School District[b]				
	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group	PT-1 Group	PT-2 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-1 Group	Pre-PT Group vs. PT-2 Group
Absence rate (%)	18.3	16.1	15.5	-2.2	-2.8	33.3	31.4	30.7	-1.9	-2.6
Sample size	92	111	151			301	318	360		
Number of credits earned	4.82	4.85	4.91	0.03	0.09	3.46	3.49	3.69	0.04	0.23
Percentage of courses passed	76.9	77.1	77.0	0.2	0.1	57.6	57.3	60.4	-0.2	2.9
Sample size	92	111	152			278	293	342		
GPA	1.82	1.89	1.75	0.07	-0.07	1.23	1.27	1.26	0.04	0.03
Percentage with GPA greater than 2.0	45.4	45.0	43.6	-0.4	-1.9	25.5	27.2	27.3	1.7	1.8
Percentage with GPA greater than 1.0	78.4	71.5	71.4	-6.9	-7.0	54.8	50.5	53.8	-4.3	-1.0
Sample size	92	111	152			278	293	342		

SOURCES: Student records from the Milwaukee Public Schools.

NOTES: All impacts for each school are regression-adjusted using the baseline characteristics listed in Tables 5.3 and 5.4.
Statistical significance levels for impacts are the following: * indicates significance at 10 percent, ** at 5 percent, and *** at 1 percent.

[a]Percentage of courses passed is equal to credits earned divided by credits attempted.

[b]MLK= Milwaukee Public Schools.

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MDRC

16 East 34 Street
New York, New York 10016
(212) 532-3200

www.mdrc.org

88 Kearny Street, Suite 1800
San Francisco, California 94108
(415) 781-3800

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